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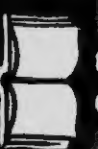
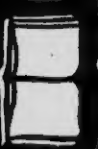
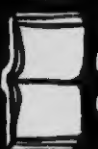
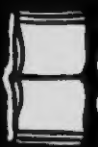
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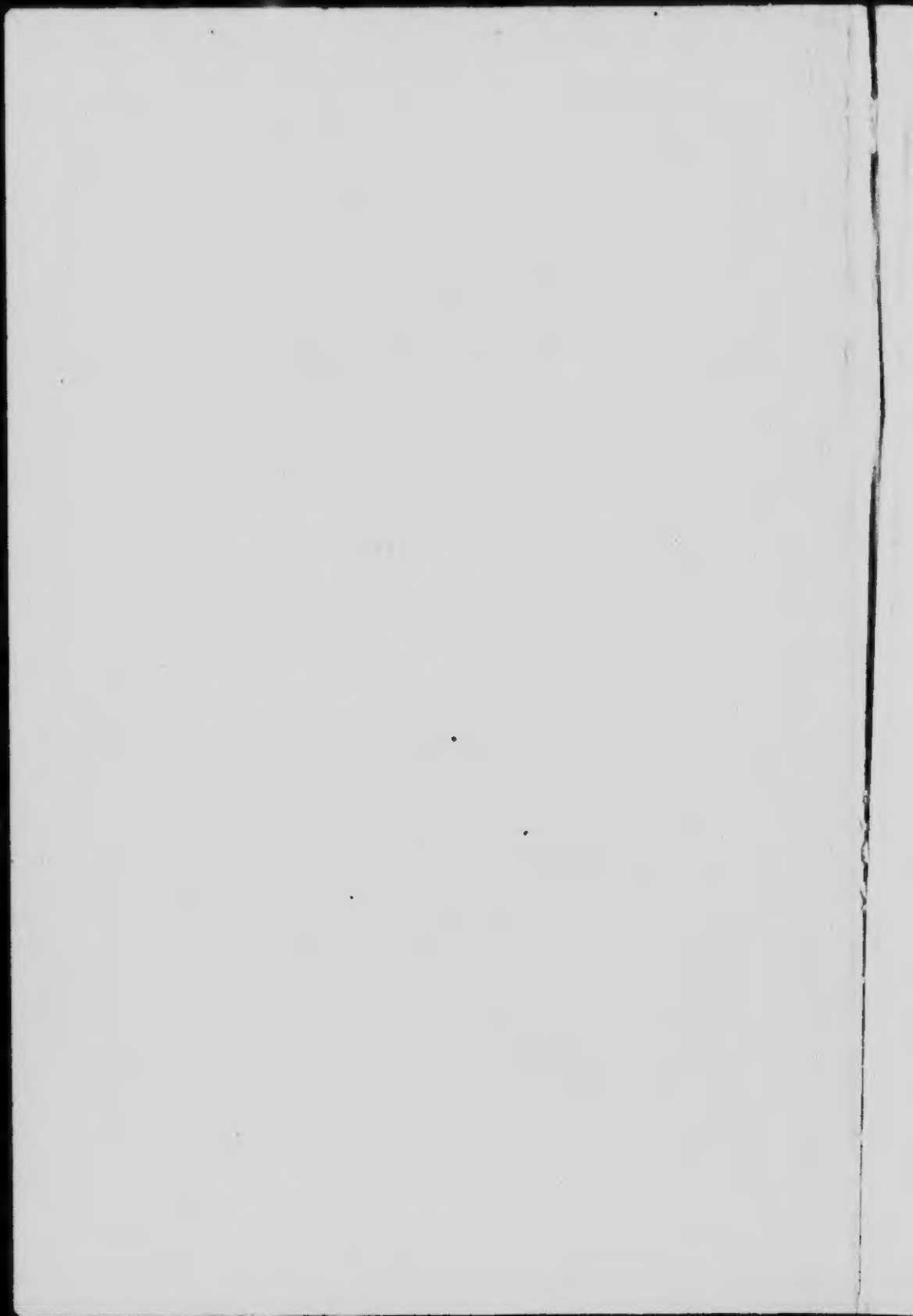
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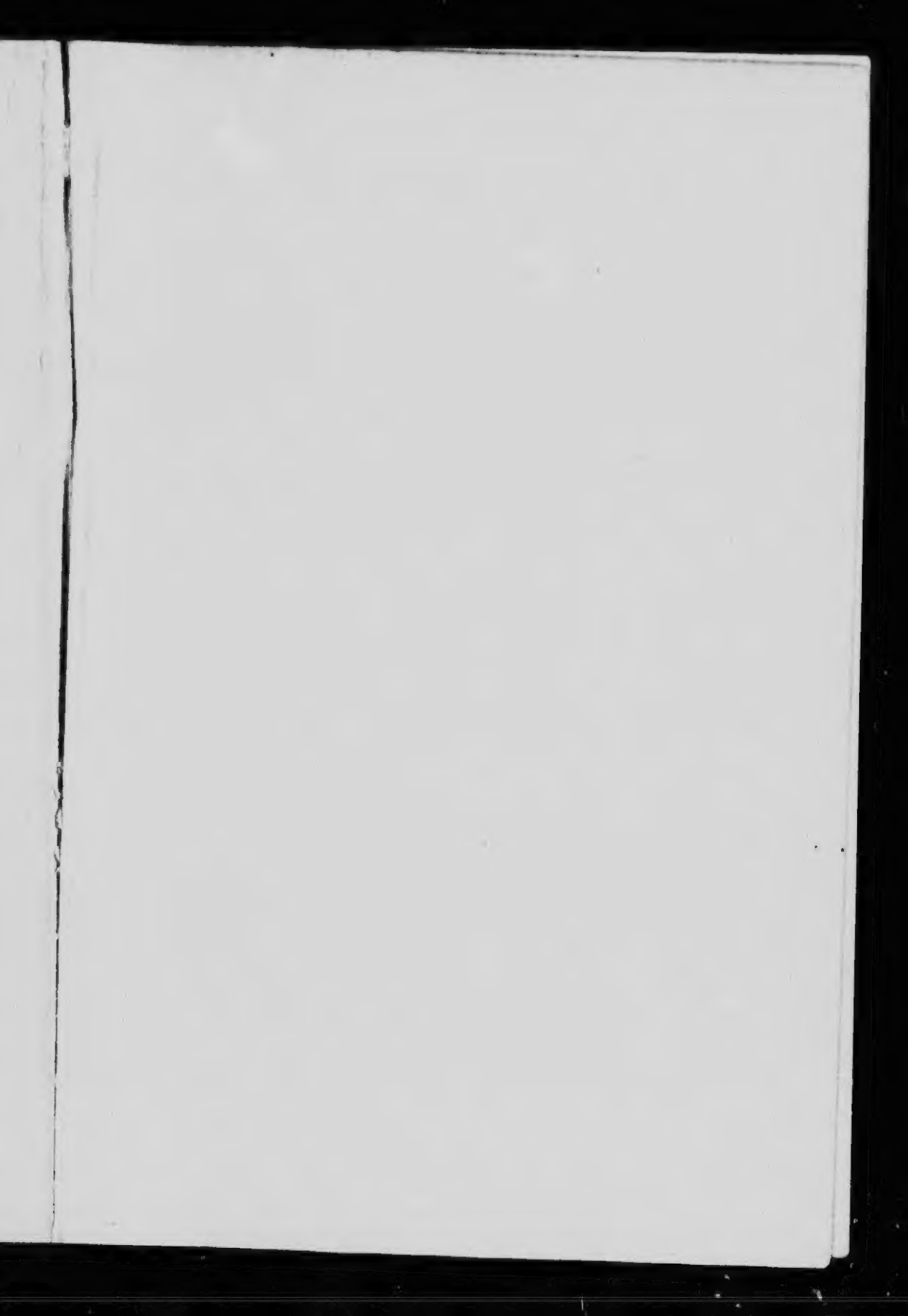
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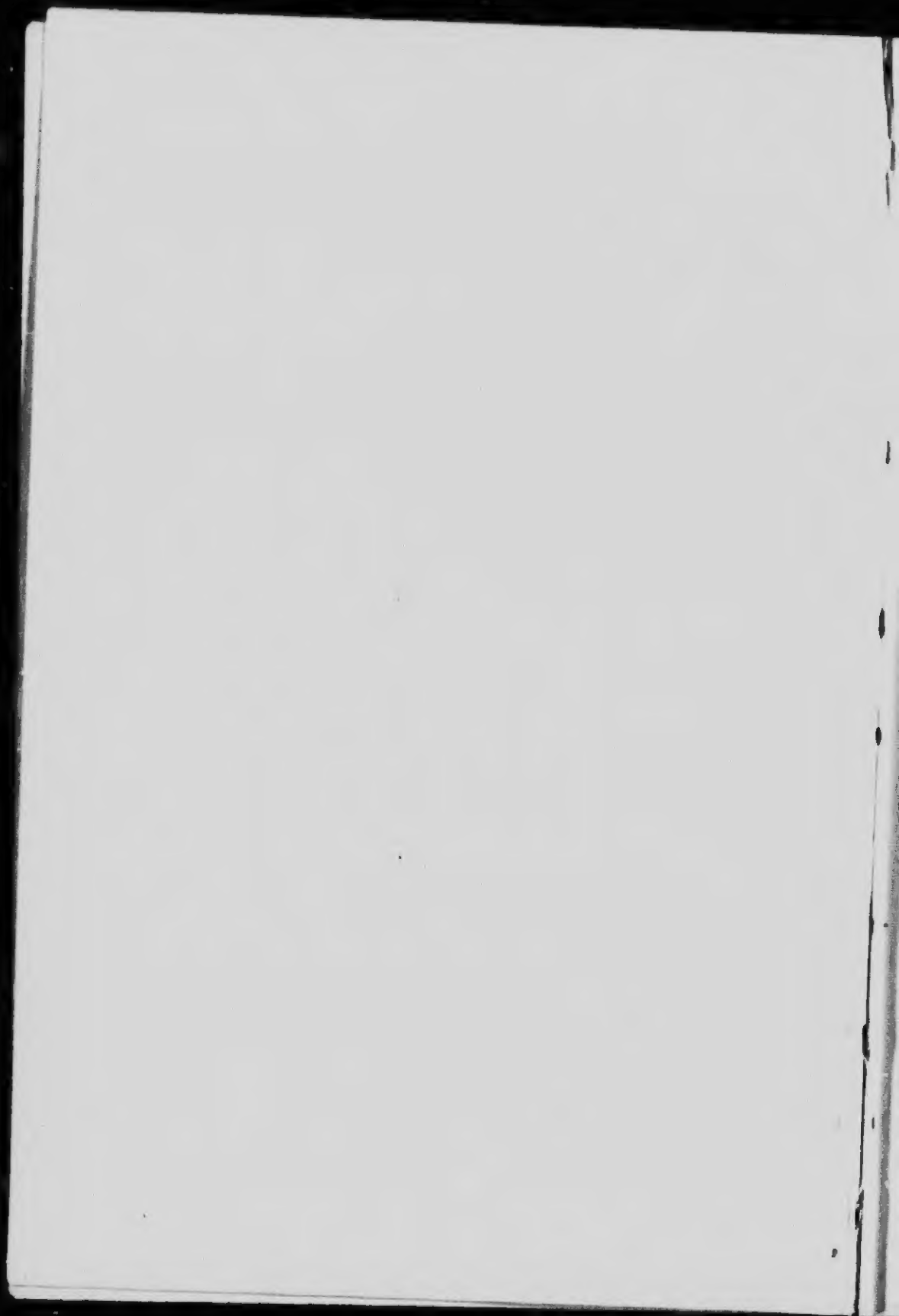
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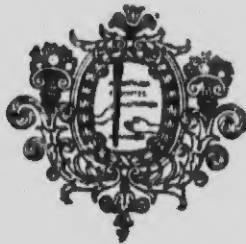
The Steps of Honor

By Basil King

Author of "Let Not Man Put Asunder"
"In the Garden of Charity"

"À tout péché—miséricorde!"

—Old French saying



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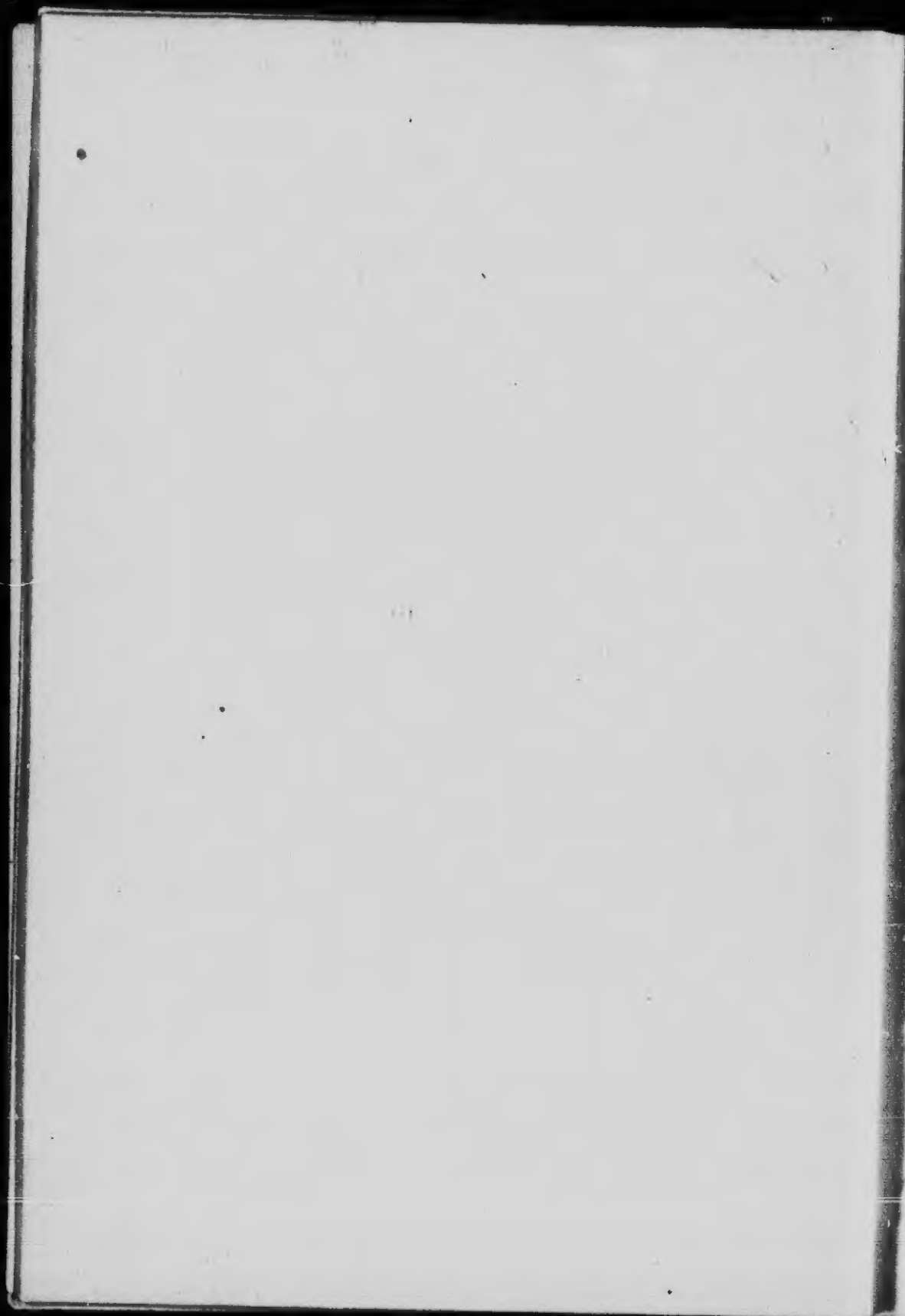
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Published April, 1904.

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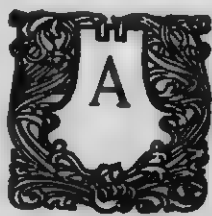
The most loyal of friends



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I



GATHA sat at her little desk with the curved legs and the gilded ornaments. The hand with which she held the pen was raised. She was evidently thinking out her sentence before putting it on paper. Persis watched her silently from the doorway.

"She hasn't heard me," Persis thought. "I wonder if I could play a trick on her?"

But even to Persis, who had not much reverence, tricks seemed out of place in the presence of that stately girl, and in that spick-and-span, white-and-gold apartment. You could see at a glance that it was a house in which there were no disturbing elements—no men, no children, no one to upset things or break them or put them out of order. The minute you entered you felt yourself in the home of one who had not only the instincts of elegance, but the money, time, and freedom from other cares to allow those instincts play. Perhaps it were better to say the lack of other cares; for it was the want of something to do and think about, while within her own walls, that had caused Agatha Royal to spend so

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much pains on her surroundings. People in Old Cambridge thought it a pity that she should pull to pieces the old house her father had left her and her great-grandfather had built; but when she crossed her own threshold Agatha had almost no other occupation. As she was thoroughly modern she cared for nothing but the antique. Whether or not it was exactly appropriate was a subject she did not go into. The hall was "Old Colonial," the library "Empire," the dining-room "Chippendale." The drawing-room in which she sat was "Louis Quinze," or as nearly "Louis Quinze" as the conditions of American architecture of the late eighteenth century permitted her to make it. She herself, with her right hand slightly raised, and the lace sleeve of her flowered silk house-gown falling back from the forearm and wrist, was not unlike some beauty of that court in which Marie Leczi ska and the Marquise de Pompadour divided the honors and authority.

"Do I behold Mrs. Montagu or Madame de Staël?" Persis inquired, after she had stood for a long minute in the doorway.

"Oh, come in, Persis," Agatha cried, turning with a quick smile. "I was just writing a note to Mr. Wollaston. If you're going home you might take it with you."

"I'm nothing if not obliging," Persis returned, advancing into the room and sinking upon a gilded sofa. She did not sit, nor yet did she recline; she drooped into the seat, twining over it, so to speak, much as a bit of climbing vine might fall upon a bench in a garden. Mrs. Arlington Revere was accustomed to say that Persis Wollaston was so thin

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that she couldn't sit upright. This was scarcely true, for on occasions Persis could hold herself with the straightest. If her movements were serpent-like and her attitudes sinuous, it was only because she was as supple as a trailing arbutus in the spring.

"Did you come for anything?" Agatha asked, as she wrote.

"That's polite," Persis answered. "Of course I know I'm not intimate enough with you to come for nothing, but—"

"It's just after lunch; that's why I asked," Agatha explained, hastily. "You know I'm glad to see you at any time. I only thought that perhaps—"

"I'd come on an errand. Well, you're right. Aunt Fanny sent me to ask you to come to dinner this evening."

"Oh!" Agatha exclaimed, with an air of embarrassment. "I should be very glad to come, only—only—I'm sending rather important news to Mr. Wollaston."

Persis was nominally sitting with her back to Agatha, but it required only a slight twist to her person to bring the two young women face to face.

"Important?" Persis repeated. "That's good. We hardly ever hear anything to which that exciting adjective can be applied. But perhaps you've requested Uncle Hector not to tell me."

"No. On the contrary, I almost feel like telling you more than I've told him."

"Now, that's what I should call condescension. There's nothing that flatters a young person of nineteen more than to know something that's been kept from her elders."

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"I'm not sure that I ought to say it," Agatha observed, as she sealed and addressed the envelope. "And yet I'm dying to tell some one."

"You couldn't find anybody more discreet," Persis assured her. "I've had secrets confided to me that I've kept for twenty-four hours and more."

"This isn't going to be a secret—not after to-morrow."

"Then all the more reason why you may tell me. I should have perfect confidence in myself till then."

Agatha rose from her desk and, coming forward, handed her letter to Persis. At the same time she drew forward a "Louis Quinze" arm-chair and sat down beside the sofa. With instinctive respect Persis straightened herself into a more becoming posture.

"No; sit still," Agatha said, in her commanding way. "Don't move on my account."

"It isn't on your account," Persis answered, promptly. "I was afraid of crushing my hat. Now, tell me your guilty secret. I can't think what it can be unless you are going to be married."

"Well, that's it."

"For pity's sake!" Persis exclaimed, sitting up straighter than ever. "For pity's sake!"

"I don't see why you should say that," Agatha remarked, in a tone almost of offence.

"There's no reason why I should, I suppose. It's only that you're twenty-five, and I'd begun to think—"

"That I was an old maid," Agatha laughed.

"Oh, I don't say that. But I'd begun to think—or to hope, rather—that you wouldn't marry at all."

"Why hope, Persis, dear?"

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"Because I felt sure that if you did you'd step in and take some one I was thinking of for myself. The choice isn't very large or very varied as it is—"

"And were you thinking of any one in particular?"

"No, not in particular. I was thinking of two or three—"

"Any one of whom would have done?"

"Oh no; for any one of whom I should have done—so they said—but for none of whom I had that sense of conviction which, it seems to me, ought to be the chief element in such a decision. Still, I'm not sure that I want to see any one else making my range narrower."

"How do you know I've done it?" Agatha asked, with a smile.

"I don't know; I'm only afraid. You're the kind of person who always gets the best of everything—though you deserve it well enough, you dear old thing. Not only has fate made you very well off, but nature has made you very good-looking—"

"But you're pretty, too, Persis, dear," Agatha interrupted.

"So they say," Persis admitted, calmly; "but if so, it's only in a morning-glory sort of way. My good looks, such as they are, won't last till the sun is up, while you'll keep yours till you're eighty. But, good gracious, don't let us talk about that now, when you're going to be married! Who in the world have you decided on?"

"I'm really not sure that I ought to tell you."

Agatha rose in some agitation and, walking to a window, looked out towards the Harvard halls just visible through the yellowing October elms.

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"All the more reason why I should be crazy to know," Persis called after her. "Besides, if it isn't to be a secret after to-morrow, why should it be one to-day?"

"It's only this," Agatha answered, turning from the window and coming back towards Persis again—"it's only this, that I promised him I wouldn't tell any one till he had spoken to Mr. Wollaston himself."

"Well, nobody considers me any one, so that need be no obstacle to your confidence."

"I *must* tell you, Persis," Agatha burst out, sinking into the arm-chair from which she had risen. "But you mustn't tell Mr. or Mrs. Wollaston till you hear it from themselves. It's Mr. Anthony Muir."

"Mr. Anthony—who?" Persis cried, though she had heard very well. "Surely not the man who wrote *Society and Conscience*?"

"Yes, Persis," Agatha said, with eyes downcast.

"Well, I never did!"

"I hope he wasn't one of the two or three?" Agatha ventured, glancing up for an instant.

"Good gracious, no! I should never have lifted my hopes so high. Everybody adores him. Aunt Fanny thinks he is the greatest writer since Emerson. I only know him from having danced with him once—"

"He dances beautifully, doesn't he?" Agatha sighed.

"Exquisitely. And he has such lovely blue eyes. I hate to see a man have blue eyes, as a rule; but his are like sapphires. He always reminds me of a Viking—with his long, fair mustache."

"So he does me," Agatha assented, simply.

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A minute or two passed in silence.

"I hope you're not marrying him," Persis said, at last, with an unusually serious expression, "just because he has written an able and successful book."

"Why, no, dear," Agatha replied, in some astonishment. "Why should you think of it?"

"Oh, only because you're ambitious and proud and uncommon. A husband who has done something remarkable seems the necessary pendant to yourself."

"You're quite wrong, I assure you," Agatha said, with a flush that might have been of either modesty or pride.

"Still," Persis insisted, "you like to know that he is out of the ordinary run of men."

"I suppose I may admit that."

"And if he hadn't been out of the ordinary run of men you wouldn't have had for him the sense of conviction you feel—that is, if you do feel it."

Agatha flushed again and glanced at Persis almost shyly.

"You needn't be under any anxiety about that," she said, with a half-laugh.

"That's good," Persis commended; "and oh, how I envy you!"

"Why envy?"

"Because," Persis sighed, "it doesn't seem to me as if I could feel it for any man. I've tried my very best and yet I haven't succeeded."

"Isn't there any one you like, Persis?"

"Plenty. But liking isn't enough. If you haven't the sense of conviction one man is just like another. I've tried to fancy myself going off to keep house with this one and that one—who've been willing enough,

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so they've said—and it's been simply out of the question. And in my case it's so important."

"Why in your case more than in any other girl's, Agatha, dear? I don't see an" reason for your thinking so."

"That's because you don't have Cousin Abby Leggett to give you her opinion about twice a month. She never ceases to remind me that as an orphan it's my duty to take myself off Uncle Hector's hands as soon as possible. She knows ever so many girls in my situation who either married or earned their own living before they were twenty. Now, I don't seem to have any vocation for the one or the other. I can neither dig nor beg; but if it is necessary to do one of the two, I should rather make it begging. That would be the equivalent of marriage—"

"You've plenty of time to think of that," Agatha broke in. "Look at me. I'm twenty-five—"

"Ah, but as I've just said, you've got that kind of beauty that makes it a matter of no importance whether you're twenty-five or fifty. You've got lines and features and dignity. I've only got a complexion."

"But that's like a rose-petal."

"Yes, and just as quick to wither. At least, that's what Cousin Abby Leggett tells me. She says that at my age she was just like me, just as willowy and pretty—I'm quoting her, please take notice—and that the reason she never married was that that variety of good looks has no enduring qualities. Before she had picked and chosen to her taste she had grown stout, and her rose-petal complexion had wilted like a flower at noonday. That, she warns me, is to be my

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fate; and so, if I could have a sense of conviction towards any one—"

"Just wait," Agatha laughed.

"I *am* waiting, but it doesn't seem to make any difference. Still, I'm relieved, Agatha. There's no use denying that. When you began I thought it must certainly be—" She hesitated, with a nervous laugh.

"One of the two or three?" Agatha supplied.

"No, not that."

"Who, then?"

"I ought not to tell you. But I thought it must be—you won't mind if I say it, will you, Agatha, dear?"

"Certainly not. Say anything you like."

"Well, on second thoughts, I think I won't," she said, rising. "I must really be going back. Aunt Fanny will want to know whether or not you're coming to dinner."

"Oh, but you must tell me," Agatha insisted, rising in her turn.

Persis laughed.

"I thought it must be—Paul Dunster," she said, at last.

Agatha turned away slowly, so that Persis did not see her face.

"You can tell Aunt Fanny I'll come to dinner," she said, gravely, looking out from the window at which she had stood before. "At seven, isn't it?"

"Yes, at seven," Persis answered, her laughter suddenly dying down.

There was a minute's pause before she spoke again.

"You're not cross with me, Agatha?" she ventured, at last, speaking tremulously.

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"No, dear; how could I be cross? Only there are some things one really oughtn't to joke about."

She came from the window and they met in the centre of the drawing-room.

"Now," Agatha said, slipping her arm about the younger girl's waist, "run home with my note, and, above all, don't say a word about what I've told you."

With arms entwined they moved towards the outer door. As Persis descended the steps leading towards the street she looked back penitently.

"I'm sorry I spoke of Paul," she said, almost huskily, with a shadow like that of tears in her big, blue eyes. "I shouldn't have done it only I'm sure he asked you. I suppose you didn't feel—"

"Any sense of conviction," Agatha said, hastily. "That's just it. Now, run off, and don't let me hear anything about it again."

"Well, he was worth it," Persis began, with a touch of indignation in her tone, but before she could get any further Agatha had closed the door.

II



AT half-past four Mrs. Wollaston tripped daintily across the Common. She walked with that light lifting of her little person which, in her youth, had been considered birdlike. Her appearance carried the fancy back to the styles of 1860. Something in the lilting of her garments as she moved suggested the crinoline; something in the way she wore her hair was like the waterfall; something in her bonnet, ample in size and high in front, with a wreath of pink roses resting on the brow beneath the brim, recalled the days when the Empress Eugénie and Queen Victoria were young. Mrs. Wollaston did not actually retain the fashions of her earlier years, she only reflected them. Any one could see that they had suited her. They suited her still, with her air of pretty primness and gentle dignity, and coquetry too simple and too native to need toning down by time.


It was one of those October afternoons in which the clear New England atmosphere seems suddenly shot with translucent gold. An hour ago the light was vivid, truthful, realistic. Everything hard and bare remained hard and bare. There was nothing to veil its severity or nakedness. Now the magic essence of afternoon was in the air. Over the marshes, over the

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Charles and through the Gothic aisles of elms the sun was throwing slanting shafts of glory, that gilded common things and set the mind to thinking of the light that never was on land or sea.

It was Mrs. Wollaston's favorite hour and favorite season for taking her daily walk. She had the American's love of sunshine and the elderly woman's sympathy with autumn. More than that, she had the Cambridge lady's pleasure in coming home when term begins and college opens and the cheerful life has started to flow anew through the Harvard halls. It had been pleasant to go to her cottage at the seaside in July; but it was pleasant to come back again to books and friends and fireside and all the interests of a life in which she had grown up and was quietly growing old. It was with a distinct sensation of contentment that she picked her way along the path across the Common. With the thumb and index-finger of her left hand she lifted her dress in front; while in her right hand, with the same characteristic prim precision she carried a letter as though it were a flower.

When she passed the Soldiers' Monument she stopped. She was in sight of Massachusetts Hall and could see when Mr. Wollaston came out. That was all she needed. She did not care to go too near and show that she was waiting for him. She liked to keep up the fiction of finding herself accidentally in his way. That was how it used to happen when they were engaged, in 1861. He had received his first appointment then and she was living with her parents in one of the big, old houses at the farther end of Brattle Street. Somehow—she never could explain



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by what fortuitous chain of tiny accidents—she was often passing up from Kirkland Street or Harvard Square just about that hour in the afternoon when the young instructor came out of Harvard Yard. It was inevitable that he should walk home with her; and it was then that were said many of the things she now kept laid away, scented with memory's best lavender, in the treasure-house of her heart. After they were married, and lived near the Common, it was still more likely that the small hazards of daily life should throw them, just at this hour, in each other's way; and many a time, during the last thirty years and more, they had walked round and round and round the village green of early Cambridge days, before stopping at their own garden gate. She never admitted, even to herself, that she went to meet him. That would have trenched upon her delicate, old-world reserve. It was always a chance—she was on an errand, or she was returning from a call; when there was no other excuse she was driven to the subterfuge that there was more shade or more sunshine, according to the season, in going home that way.

This afternoon, however, she carried her reason in her hand. Persis had brought Agatha's note and had delivered it with so much mystery that Mrs. Wollaston was sure it was important. As to the contents, she had questioned Persis in that discreet way in which there is as little betrayal of curiosity as possible; but Persis was loyal to her word to Agatha. Mrs. Wollaston was just as well pleased that it should be so, for it gave her an obvious reason for going to meet her husband. It was evident, she argued, that if the letter were important no time should be lost in

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its delivery. It was one of those occasions, therefore, when she could boldly linger about that portion of the Common nearest to Massachusetts Hall, without making apologies to her self-respect. She sauntered now one way, now another. As she turned towards the two churches nearest the Common she quoted silently The Autocrat's lines on them, and sighed softly as she recalled the day when he had come to read her the poem before its publication.

"Like Sentinel and Nun they keep
Their vigil on the green;
One seems to ward and one to weep
The dead that lie between."

"We have no one so brilliant now," she said to herself. "There may be others just as able, but no one who has his scintillating geniality."

She recalled, too, the opening lines of Longfellow's poem on that Miss Vassall, who, according to tradition, lies buried with a slave at her head and a slave at her feet in the graveyard over which the Sentinel and Nun watch and pray together.

"In the village church-yard she lies,
Dust is in her beautiful eyes,
No more she breathes, nor feels, nor stirs;
At her feet and at her head
Lies a slave to attend the dead,
But their dust is as white as hers."

"How amusing he was," she reflected, with a half-smile, "the day I was foolish enough to ask him whether the two slaves died conveniently the same day as she, or whether she had commanded them to

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be slain. 'Neither; she had them buried alive!' Dear Mr. Longfellow! I shall never feel that Cambridge is quite the same place without him."

She turned again towards the college and noted with pleasure the fine color-effects of the sunlight on the red brick of the old Georgian halls, shaded as they were by yellowing elms and half hidden under many-tinted, climbing vines. It was her favorite point of view; it was the one she had been used to all her life; and, in her opinion, no architectural beauty in Rouen, Venice, or Rome was so restful to the eye or satisfying to the spirit as that to be had just here. When a few minutes later the bell on Harvard Hall began to ring, and long lines of undergraduates trooped out, filing away in all directions, the human interest that came into the picture gave perfection to the scene. That human interest reached its height when a tall, spare, slightly stooping figure came from Massachusetts Hall and passed the Memorial Gateway.

With her lilting, birdlike tread Mrs. Wollaston went on to meet her husband. As she did so the suggestion of a flush mantled in her delicately faded cheek. In the dignified occupant of the Chair of Mediæval Literature—the man with bowed frame and gray hair and wrinkled cheek—she never lost sight of the stalwart, upright, buoyant aspirant to scholastic fame who had been twenty-five in 1861. He had grown old so gradually that it required an effort on her part to perceive it. The change had come minute by minute and bit by bit, under her very eyes; and so it was only when she saw some old daguerreotype or photograph, which showed him as he had been, that she knew it had come at all. As

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she saw him now there still beat in her heart some echo of the emotion with which she welcomed his approach in the year when they were engaged.

He walked with eyes fixed on the ground and did not look up until she was before him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Did you happen to be going by?" He, too, kept up the theory of accidental meetings, perhaps knowing nothing of his wife's simple arts.

"No, dear," she answered, with what for her was boldness. "I came on purpose. Persis has just brought this note from Agatha. She said it was important, so I thought you would like to have it at once."

He took it and turned it over, thrusting out his under-lip with an expression which every artist in the university knew how to caricature.

"Hmph!" he ejaculated, as he turned to walk homeward beside her. "More trouble, I suppose."

"I don't know why she should give you trouble, Hector. She never has."

"She always has. As girls go, I suppose she's a good girl—"

"A very good girl, Hector; a good, fine, noble-hearted girl."

"Oh, I dare say, I dare say. You'd say that of Fredegonde herself; but I contend that the best of girls is but labor and sorrow to a man who doesn't like 'em."

"But you used to, Hector." Mrs. Wollaston protested, with a smile and a deepening of tint.

"I've got beyond that stage, and so have you, my dear. If you were still young and pretty, I shouldn't be half as fond of you as I am."

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"If that's a compliment, dear, I suppose I ought to like it. But aren't you going to read your letter? Agatha may have something important to say."

He tore the envelope open and, as his eyes hastily scanned the lines, he uttered a quick exclamation.

"What on earth does she mean?" he cried, turning sharply to his wife.

"I could tell that better, dear," she answered, gently, "if I knew what she says."

"Well, listen to this," he went on:

"DEAR MR. WOLLASTON,—I have a wonderful piece of news for you. I am not going to be a trouble to you any more. I am engaged to be married. I shall tell you to whom when we meet—that is, if he has not already done so. With warmest love to Mrs. Wollaston, believe me, yours ever affectionately,
AGATHA ROYAL."

"Well, what do you think of that?"

"It depends on him," Mrs. Wollaston answered, cautiously. "If it's Paul Dunster—"

"Paul Dunster or anybody else will do for me," the old man cried, with a glee that a stranger would have called wicked. "The man who takes her off my hands will have my benediction, whoever he may be. I never understood what sin I had committed that merited my being saddled with other people's children. If it had been boys I could have borne it better. But girls!"

"You've only had one, Hector—that is, besides Persis, who is your niece."

"She couldn't have caused me more anxiety if she had been ten."

"And her father was your oldest friend."

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"He couldn't have served me a worse turn if he had been my oldest enemy."

"Agatha is such a sensible girl, too, that all you've had to do has been to consent to the plans she has made for herself."

"It isn't work that breaks a man down, my dear; it's responsibility. She has managed to take pretty good care of herself; but if anything had gone wrong with her or her money I should have been to blame. Now, at least, I shall have some peace of mind. We'll hasten the wedding and then I shall spend my declining years in a well-earned serenity."

"I should think your serenity would depend a good deal on the sort of man she married."

"No, no; I shall have nothing to do with that. She's twenty-five. She's independent. If I could pick out a man and make her fall in love with him I should have done it long ago. It's all one to me if she's taken a fancy to a chimney-sweep, so long as she gets herself off my hands."

"Of course, I know you don't mean that, Hector, dear; and if it's Paul Dunster—"

"Then so much the better. But it's nothing to me."

"But if it is he, it will be an excellent match in every way. His family are well-established Old Cambridge people; he has a little money and I suppose his future in the college is secure. He's been very attentive to her for some time past. I should think she couldn't do better."

"Then let us pray that he may be the man. He's coming in to dinner to-night and I shall ask him."

"Oh, don't do that, Hector. If it shouldn't be he—"

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"Then he'd only have to say so."

"But you might be stumbling on something you'd be sorry for. That isn't the way, dear. After all, it may be some one else, though there's only one other man I can think of—Mr. Anthony Muir."

"What? That tall fellow in the English Department? He's written a book—the Lord knows what—that has sold up in the hundreds of thousands—the Lord knows why."

"It's a beautiful book, Hector. I read it while we were in the country. It's called *Society and Conscience*. It's full of the most striking passages and the point of view is quite novel."

"And people nowadays like what's novel better than what's true."

"That isn't the case with this book, Hector, dear. It really is illuminating on some of the most difficult problems of our people. Not that it solves anything; it is only very suggestive."

"I've looked into it," the old man admitted, gruffly. "It's a better book than I thought any of our present brood of young men could write, though that isn't meant to be high praise. There's something old-fashioned, too, in the style, as if Longfellow had conceived it and Hawthorne written it down and Emerson corrected it and made it unworthy of them all. Old Pinckney was speaking of it the other day. He was very funny about it in his ill-natured way. He said it was like a jelly made of Josiah Royce and Jacob Riis and John Graham Brooks, so that you get the taste of all three without being able to tell t'other from which."

"That doesn't strike me as very fair," Mrs. Wollas-

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ton said, in her pretty, serious way. "For my part, I think Mr. Muir has something of the seer in him, just as Mr. Emerson had. In reading his book I couldn't help feeling that we had gone back to another and a better time. When I first saw that he was rather taken up with Agatha I was sorry for it. But after I had read the book— Why, how curious! There he is now. He's coming out of Radcliffe. He looks as if he were walking to meet us."

As she spoke, a tall, young man, more elegantly dressed than assistant professors at Harvard usually are, crossed the road near the Washington Elm and came in their direction. In his upright carriage and springing step there was something of the confidence, and perhaps more of the elation, of success.

"He's good-looking," Mrs. Wollaston said, as they watched him draw near. "You can see he isn't a thorough American, but any girl might envy his complexion. I suppose it's Scotch."

"And this is the new prophet," the professor remarked, with an air of ironical criticism. "He has bright, blue eyes and a sweeping, blond mustache. He wears a frock-coat of the best cut, a sleek silk hat and gloves. He carries a cane nicely ornamented with silver bands, and he swings it gracefully as he walks. Do you remember the story Tennyson told us of a young friend of his who liked Brighton because it reminded him of Switzerland? Well, just in the same way Anthony Muir reminds me of Emerson. There never was a prophet, from Elijah the Tishbite downward, who was careful about his clothes."

"And yet Carlyle says, 'Clothes have made men of us,'" Mrs. Wollaston argued.

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"But, my dear, he goes on to say, 'They are threatening to make clothes-screens of us.' If I hadn't looked into your Anthony Muir's book myself, I should have put him down as one in whom the menace was fulfilled."

"Which only shows," Mrs. Wollaston said, with that toss of the head people had called arch when she was young, "to what an extent the best of men can be unjust."

There was no time to say more, for Anthony Muir had already lifted his hat and held out his hand. His greetings were gracefully offered; and if in his manner there was, from the American point of view, a slight degree of over-accentuation, at least there was no excess. If he bowed more frequently and flexibly than the average New-Englander, he did so with a deference that pleased most women and did not annoy most men. In approaching Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston he took command of the situation with the readiness of a person for whom there is no such thing as social awkwardness and to whom all the little nothings, that make the opening of conversation natural, are familiar. He was neither shy nor forward; he only took all the trouble upon himself and put every one immediately at his ease. Mrs. Wollaston liked his manner; any woman would have liked it. She could not understand why her husband should thrust out his under-lip and rub his hands with suppressed irritation the minute the young man spoke.

"I'm glad I've met you, professor," Anthony Muir went on, fluently, "because I was on my way to your house."

"Well, you see I'm out," Mr. Wollaston said, bluntly.

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"If you'll allow me," Muir went on, ignoring the old man's incivility, "I'll come round when you're in. Perhaps you and Mrs. Wollaston could see me a little later in the afternoon. I've something rather important to say—"

"Say it now, then," the professor broke in, with a touch of impatience. "We're not in a hurry. We can listen."

"It won't take long," Muir said, smiling, with a superior air of patience. "Miss Royal asked me to tell you."

Mrs. Wollaston gave a little start and slipped her hand through her husband's arm.

"She has promised to become my wife," Muir continued, with the same ease of manner. "She will tell you herself later, but we thought it best that I should do so first."

"We're not surprised," Mr. Wollaston admitted, promptly. "My wife and I were just talking of it as you came up."

"One sees these little things coming, Mr. Muir," Mrs. Wollaston began, with the intention of offering their congratulations.

"And we thought it would be Paul Dunster," the old man broke in. "She was fonder of him than of anybody else."

"Oh, Hector!" Mrs. Wollaston interposed.

"Well, she was," he insisted. "You said so yourself not fifteen minutes ago. You said it was the best match she could make and you made me say so, too. Mind you, Muir, I've got nothing to say in the matter. I'm only just telling you that your news is something of a disappointment to my wife."

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"Please, Hector, don't say that," Mrs. Wollaston pleaded, almost with tears. "That wasn't the way I meant it, Mr. Muir, I beg you to believe. I do like Mr. Dunster, and I admit that I had thought of him in connection with Agatha. But ever since I've read your book I've seemed to know you so much better; and when I say that I hope you may both be very happy, I am sure you will think me quite sincere."

She held out her hand and he bowed over it with his usual grace.

"Well, Muir," the professor said, with an air of resignation to that which he could not help, "I've got nothing to say in the matter. Agatha is of age. She's free to pick for herself. I neither make matches nor mar them. I confess I've had my mind made up for Paul Dunster ever since I saw she was so fond of him; but probably he didn't ask her. If she thinks you're good enough to take his place, I suppose you are. Anyhow, we'll let by-gones be by-gones and say no more about it. Old men's hopes are not very sanguine at the best and I never expected Agatha Royal to display more sense than the Lord had given her."

"I must thank you that your objection to me is no stronger than it is," Muir said, good-naturedly.

"Oh, I've no objection, exactly—" he began, but this time Mrs. Wollaston interfered.

"Won't you come in and dine with us at seven?" she asked, rather tremulously. "Agatha is coming—"

"And so is Paul Dunster," the professor interposed.

"Yes, and so is Mr. Dunster," Mrs. Wollaston echoed, eager to cover up her husband's lack of cour-

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tesy. "You'll like that, Hector, because then you can play bridge. Agatha and Mr. Dunster play beautifully, and I'm sure Mr. Muir, who does everything so well—"

"Oh, I can take a hand," Muir laughed. "It's very often the bridge of asses and oftener still the bridge of sighs, but still I can make a fourth."

"Which neither Persis nor I can do," Mrs. Wollaston said, trying to make the conversation easy. "My husband is so fond of bridge that he will be delighted and you, too, will like to see Agatha. May I ask if we are to keep the news a secret?"

"No, not now," Muir replied. "We naturally didn't tell anybody before you knew it, but now—"

"Well, good-bye for the present," she said, offering her hand with a smile. "We'll look for you at seven."

"I'll come with pleasure, and very many thanks."

The professor, too, held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Muir, till this evening," he said, stiffly, "and don't forget that I've got nothing to do with this business in any way. I was Agatha's guardian till she was twenty-one; but I've no responsibility for her now."

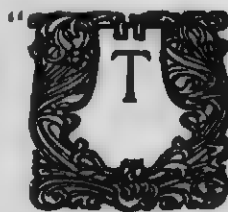
"Of course not—of course not," Muir murmured, politely.

When the old man had turned away Mrs. Wollaston took Muir's hand again and gave it a little squeeze.

"You mustn't mind him," she whispered. "He may speak roughly, but nobody in the world has a kinder heart."

Then she, too, lilted away to join her husband.

III



"THAT'S good—that's good," Mr. Wollaston chuckled, as they drew near their own gate.

"And yet you didn't speak as if you liked him much," Mrs. Wollaston said, with a slight suggestion of reproof.

"I haven't got to marry him. It doesn't matter whether I like him or not. The essential is that some one else is going to look after her and I shall be free."

"I wish we knew a little more about him," Mrs. Wollaston sighed. "As a man he is charming and as a writer he is quite unusual."

"Isn't that enough?"

"Oh yes, Hector, dear. I think every one ought to be judged on his own merits. I'm republican enough for that. But Agatha belongs to a very old Massachusetts family and so it seems a pity—"

"That any outsider should get her. Is that it?"

"Well, not exactly, Hector. I only mean—"

"I know what you mean and what you haven't the courage to say. You mean that the old, intellectual aristocracy of New England, of which your family and mine form part, are the Lord's chosen people—that all who are outside are but Hivites and Hittites,

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whether they come from California, Texas, or Illinois—"

"I don't, Hector," she protested. "I believe all our people ought to be admitted to the same privileges as ourselves. It would make no difference to me what part of the country a man came from—not even if it was from New York. I'm more broad-minded than you think. I was only wishing that we knew more about Mr. Muir's origin than we do."

"Well, I can tell you. His father was Alexander Muir, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. He was a remarkable man in his day, and was one of the first of the foreign professors to be invited to this country to deliver a course of lectures. At Ann Arbor, I think it was, he met a young Chicago lady and married her. That was before the days when marrying into Chicago meant marrying money. When Muir died, a few years later, he left his widow nothing but a big library and a baby. She, poor soul, brought both of them to Boston. She kept the baby and sold the books. I have some of them now. Almost every man in the college has some of them. The baby grew up and went brilliantly through Harvard and is now engaged to Agatha Royal. I believe the mother died. Surely that's enough to know about any man."

"Quite, Hector, dear. You mustn't think I'm curious. I believe in judging every man just for what he is. Only if he has a background, so to speak, one likes to know it. I should never think the worse of any one because one of his parents came from Scotland and the other from Chicago. That wouldn't be his fault. Everybody can't be born in Massa-

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chusetts. I'm the first to admit that. If it wasn't that Mr. Dunster was there, about whom we know everything— Poor Mr. Dunster!" she exclaimed, in another tone. "I'm sure we ought to consider him. Agatha's engagement will be a blow to him. I wouldn't for anything that he should hear it bluntly, perhaps at dinner to-night, or even playing bridge. It would upset him terribly."

Her heart beat with a quicker flutter, in sympathy with the poor young man. Her reasons for thinking him disappointed in his affections were wholly insufficient; but she would not have been a sweet, elderly lady with a taste for sentiment, had she not believed them sound. He had been "attentive" to Agatha the previous winter, and during the summer, when Mrs. Wollaston met him at Bar Harbor, he told her he had had a letter from Miss Royal. Surely any one could see that there was more here than met the eye; especially when on one side there was a rich and handsome girl of twenty-five, and on the other a wholly eligible young man of thirty, who might reasonably be supposed to be looking for a wife. Mrs. Wollaston had no objection to Anthony Muir; but she acknowledged that as a candidate for Agatha's hand she would have preferred Paul Dunster. Mr. Muir's origin seemed respectable but vague, while Paul Dunster's family had lived in Old Cambridge ever since Harvard was in its infancy. He had an ancestress on his mother's side who had been burned for witchcraft at Salem and still another on his father's who had been hanged on Boston Common for preaching Quakerism. There was thus about Mr. Dunster a definiteness that Mr. Muir seemed to lack. Not that

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it mattered much, Mrs. Wollaston kept repeating to herself; only that in losing Agatha Royal it would be but natural if Mr. Dunster should feel that a newcomer was taking from him something to which he, with his New England antecedents, had a prior claim.

She spoke of it to her husband again, after he had dressed for dinner.

"He ought not to be taken by surprise, poor fellow," she said, tenderly, before they went downstairs. "If you would occupy the others for a minute, Hector, dear—"

"Then you'd tell him, I suppose?"

"Yes, that was my idea. Just a word, you know."

"Well, I don't see why I shouldn't tell him myself," the professor said, complainingly. "I haven't broken anything to any one for a long time. You seem to think I've no tact."

"Oh, Hector!"

"Yes, you do. You clip my sentences and make me seem to say things I don't mean and explain me to people as if I were an edition published with annotations."

"Oh, Hector!" Mrs. Wollaston said again, unable to deny the truth of her husband's allegations.

"Mr. Dunster is down-stairs, ma'am," the maid announced, coming to the open door of Mrs. Wollaston's room.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed the lady. "I sha'n't be ready for another five minutes, and Persis is always late. He's exceedingly punctual. It's only striking seven. You'll have to go down, Hector."

As her husband gave a final look at his toilet pre-

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paratory to descending, she longed to tell him to be careful in what he said; but after his complaint of a minute before she did not dare. She could only go on catching at invisible "eyes" with clawlike "hooks," and pray that Mr. Wollaston might be inspired with the gift of speech.

As he went down-stairs he felt that he was.

"Good-evening, Dunster," he said, in his heartiest way. "You must excuse Mrs. Wollaston. She'll be down in a minute. She didn't expect you so early."

"I thought Mrs. Wollaston said seven," the young man ventured, in excuse.

"Quite so, quite so; that's all right. She did say seven; but when you say seven, you know, you generally expect to have the traditional quarter of an hour's grace. My wife thought she'd get it and so she didn't hurry. Glad to see you, just the same. Come into my den and we'll have a chat. That's a good suggestion," he thought, as he took Dunster's coat and hung it up. "I'll give him a glass of sherry and thaw him out, if Fanny will only allow us time."

"I'm sorry I'm so early," Dunster said, as he preceded his host into the study—a big, old-fashioned room with well-worn furniture and walls lined with books.

"No, no, no!" Mr. Wollaston exclaimed, good-naturedly. "I'm used to having people on my hands and talking against time. You must know what it is yourself with the students dropping in on you at all hours, from breakfast to bedtime. Terrible nuisance, and always has been. The faculty ought to forbid it, 'pon my word. There, sit down in that chair. It's my favorite, but I don't get it

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one time out of ten. Some loafer is sure to drop into it because it's the best."

"Oh, please don't let me take it from you—" Dunster protested.

"Sit down, sit down," the professor insisted, gently pushing him into the chair. "I want you to taste this sherry. Old Pinckney sent it to me, after I had taken some courses for him when he was ill. I don't like sherry myself, but I keep this on tap in the cupboard here and dose people with it when I don't want to talk to 'em. It's a good trick. I recommend it to you, when your time is taken up with fellows who've got nothing to stay for and don't know how to go. There, taste that. They all say it's good, but I suppose they'd say so, anyhow."

He thrust the glass into Dunster's hand and drew up a chair. "I wish Fanny could see how I'm doing it," he said to himself. "She's one of the women who think that when she dies tact will die with her."

"This is what I call friendly, Dunster," he said, aloud. "I hate to have a man wait till the last minute just for the sake of being polite. Besides, I wanted to see you privately."

"Yes?" Dunster said, looking at ease for the first time. "Then it won't matter that I'm so inconveniently ahead of time?"

He was a stocky, sturdy type of young New-Englander; clear-skinned, clear-eyed, frank, and sincere, as any one could see at a glance. His colleagues thought him literal, downright, outspoken and too pugnacious. Old Pinckney said of him that if he had a difference of opinion with any one he knocked him down by way of persuasion. Something of this

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was evident, even as he sat in Mr. Wollaston's favorite chair, by the way in which he held his head, as if he had just thrown a challenge.

"Yes," the old man continued, in a confidential tone, drawing his chair nearer and tapping Dunster on the knee. "I wanted a word with you on a very particular bit of business."

Dunster looked pleased and wondered if there was a chance, after all, of getting his assistant-professorship.

"You know Agatha Royal, I think?"

"Oh yes, quite well," Dunster replied, readily, though taken by surprise.

"A little more than quite well, I understand," the old man said, with a look that was meant to be knowing and, at the same time, sympathetic.

"Possibly," Dunster assented, with a smile. "Miss Royal has always been very nice to me."

"She's a ward of mine. At least, she was till she came of age."

"So I understood."

"Well, that girl's been a great disappointment to me—a great disappointment."

"Oh, Mr. Wollaston," Dunster cried, his eyes wide open with astonishment, "I can't believe it."

"It's true. It's true. Don't you make any mistake about that. And she'll be a disappointment to you, too, as much as to me—more than to me."

"But, professor, I assure you—"

"She'd have made your life wretched, Dunster. Not but what she's a good girl. I've always allowed that—"

"But, Mr. Wollaston, if you'll permit me—"

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"She wasn't the woman for you, Dunster, more's the pity. I'll admit that you're the man I had picked out for her—in my own mind, that is to say. Mrs. Wollaston had picked you out, too; and she doesn't often make a mistake. No later than this afternoon we were talking of what a good match it would be; when we saw that it was out of the question. If you didn't ask her—"

"I assure you I didn't; though—"

"Then you were behind time, so it's partly your own fault. She's twenty-five, and not far from twenty-six. It wasn't to be supposed that she'd wait forever; you'll allow that yourself. If you didn't ask her, that's your own lookout. I'm less disappointed in her than I was. A woman can hardly be expected to marry a man who didn't ask her; come, now, you'll allow that's fair. But Mrs. Wollaston and I thought you *had* asked her, and that she hadn't taken you because you were too short, or because you had a cast in your eye, or from some other such woman's whim. We were talking of it just before you came. But if you didn't ask her, that puts another face on it; so it isn't to be wondered at that she took the man who did."

"You mean, sir, that Miss Royal is engaged?"

The way in which Dunster grasped the arms of the chair and thrust himself forward as if he could not catch the answer quickly enough, made clear what he would have done if he had had the opportunity.

"Certainly," the professor said, rather stiffly. "That's what I'm breaking to you."

"May I ask to whom?"

"To Anthony Muir."

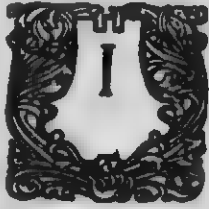
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"Good God!" Dunster cried, springing to his feet and growing pale. "Good God, professor," he repeated, "there's something wrong with the man! She can't marry him."

The professor rose too, almost pale in his turn. Then there came a tap at the door, and Mrs. Wollaston's voice was heard without.

"Hector, everybody is here, and dinner has been announced long ago."

IV

 "DON'T know what you mean," Mr. Wollaston whispered. "Stay a minute after the others have gone and tell me."

"No, professor," Dunster whispered back. "Muir will tell you himself."

"In any case you've got to dine with him now and play bridge with him afterwards."

"Ah!" Dunster exclaimed, with a start. "Is he to be here?"

"Yes, and you must act as if it was all right. My wife mustn't suspect anything."

"Are you ever coming, Hector?" Mrs. Wollaston called again.

"I won't betray anything," the young man had just time to say, before they passed out into the hall.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Wollaston."

"Good-evening, Mr. Dunster. Do excuse me for being so late. The fact is that we've had important news to-day and everything is a little behindhand."

"So your husband's just been telling me," Dunster said, with all necessary outward calmness.

Mrs. Wollaston scanned him rapidly and wondered where men kept their hearts so as to be able to maintain such admirable control over their tones and feat-

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ures. It exasperated her to see a young man, who must be facing the disappointment of a lifetime, smiling and bowing as if nothing had occurred. She would have despised him if he had betrayed too much emotion; but she thought a ruffled brow or a face slightly drawn was the least that could be looked for under all the circumstances. She was not fond of the theatre, but she liked a bit of drama under her own roof. It was, therefore, with a distinct sense of satisfaction that, a minute later, she saw him offer his hand to Muir with a certain freezing dignity and, though he knew of the engagement, offer no congratulations. Then he passed on towards Agatha.

She was standing at the farther end of the long, old-fashioned room—a tall, commanding figure in black with a chain of pearls falling around her neck and looped up at her waist.

"He knows," whispered Persis, who was beside her. "I can tell by the effort he is making to seem at ease."

"Don't go," Agatha begged, as Persis moved away. "Don't leave me alone with him."

"I've just heard an interesting bit of news," he said, smiling tranquilly. "I need hardly tell you that I hope you're going to be happy."

"Thanks, Paul," she returned, in his own tone of quiet friendliness. "I should have known that you wished me that."

"I believe," said Mr. Wollaston, stepping up, "that I'm to have the honor of leading the heroine of the occasion in to dinner."

"Mr. Dunster, will you take Persis?" Mrs. Wollaston requested, and the little procession started off regardless of any order of precedence.

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"What I admired most in your congratulations to Agatha, just now," Persis said to Dunster as they crossed the hall to the dining-room, "was what you didn't say."

Dunster turned with a quick, questioning look at the slender girl in white beside him.

"That leaves you a large field," he laughed. "I didn't say—a good many things."

"That people, on such occasions, generally do say. I wonder why you left them out?"

"If I were you I should let that remain among the unsolved riddles of the universe."

"I couldn't," she answered, as she reached her seat. "I've such a thirst for knowledge."

At table Mrs. Wollaston felt the situation painful but romantic. To have the rivals one on her right hand and the other on her left placed her in a difficult situation which she enjoyed. To be unobtrusively triumphant with Muir and delicately sympathetic with Dunster called for just that kind of tact for which she knew she had an instinct. She liked the attitude of both young men—Muir quietly attentive to herself, and not parading his victory—Dunster amiably talkative with Agatha, and showing no sense of his defeat. It made her regret more keenly that Dunster had not won the prize; and yet, as her acquaintance with Muir progressed, she could not but own that he was the man for Agatha.

Of Agatha herself she was less sure. Had she not stood slightly in awe of her she would have asked directly, as Persis had done in the morning, whether or not she felt "the sense of conviction" which her new situation demanded.

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"She's a good girl," she had said to herself several times during the last two or three hours, "and for that very reason she's quite capable of making a marriage in which the heart would count for less than the conscience. I'm not sure that she doesn't belong to that type of New England woman for whom moral approbation means more than love."

Now and then, when Muir turned to talk to Persis, or when the conversation became general, Mrs. Wollaston found time to glance at Agatha with special attention. She would have done so in any case, for a newly engaged girl was always an object that attracted her; but when the girl was Agatha Royal, whom she had almost brought up, it was natural that her interest should be keen. Between the two there was a strong affection, tinged on Mrs. Wollaston's side with the slightest shade of disapproval. She had often said in private to her husband that but for certain qualities Agatha would have been an ideal woman; and the thought occurred to her now as she looked at her across the table. The small, proud head, with its abundant dark hair simply parted and rippling away from the forehead, was just what Mrs. Wollaston liked. She liked, too, the small, regular features that impressed the beholder by their refinement rather than by their beauty. This she held to be the special inheritance of Puritan women sprung from an ancestry devoted to the good and drilled to the suppression of the sensuous. That Agatha had practical feminine capabilities was also for Mrs. Wollaston a cause of satisfaction—a satisfaction that was not unmingled with pride when, as often happened, Agatha came to seek counsel of her own more experienced housewifely wisdom.

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All this was excellent. But there were other tendencies in Agatha's character with which Mrs. Wollaston was less content. For instance, since she had become her own mistress she had manifested a taste for elegance quite out of keeping with the way in which the Royals and the Wollastons had always lived. Their standard had been simple, comfortable and homelike, without taking much account of beauty; whereas Agatha gave beauty a wholly ridiculous importance both in her person and her surroundings. Why it should make any difference whether a chair was Empire or Louis Quinze was something Mrs. Wollaston could never see; and what Louis Quinze and Empire had to do with a modest American household passed, so she said, her uttermost comprehension. Her own dwelling had been furnished in the early sixties, and nearly everything had come from Bristol's, at that time the best place in Boston; and no one, as far as she knew, had been other than satisfied with her heavy mahoganies and coverings of green rep with a stripe of black and yellow. Isaac and Ellen Royal, Agatha's parents, had furnished about the same time in about the same way; but as soon as Agatha had obtained a free hand she had turned everything upside down in order to gratify her fancies. Mrs. Wollaston had looked on and said nothing; she prided herself on the extent to which she could hold her tongue; but none the less her heart was often hot within her and she longed to give the girl some good advice.

It was the same with Agatha's taste in dress. That it was quiet and becoming Mrs. Wollaston could not deny; neither could she deny that it was expen-

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sive. It followed the fashions to quite an unnecessary degree and gowns that had been in evidence only for a spring or a summer disappeared in a way Mrs. Wollaston could never account for. Persis said they were discreetly disposed of through the Vincent Club, and that when "made over" they enabled many a struggling working-girl to have the pleasure of appearing at her best. If this was so, Mrs. Wollaston could scarcely criticise; and yet the systematic giving away of one's clothes before they were worn out was a form of charity too audacious for her entire commendation.

"Agatha spends a great deal of money on her clothes," she had sighed to her husband one day a year or two before.

"Well, so do you," had been the unexpected retort.

"Oh, Hector, how you talk! I haven't had a new dress since—since my last black silk."

"I didn't see that you needed that. All your dresses are alike. I never can tell one from another."

"I only hope that Persis won't have the same ideas," Mrs. Wollaston had said, shifting her ground.

"And I hope she will. When Persis leaves school she shall have a new dress every time she wants one."

"I know you're only saying that, dear. Fond as you are of Persis, you're the last person in the world to encourage her in extravagance."

The subject dropped and Mrs. Wollaston never took it up again. She was, indeed, unwilling to call attention to the fact that she had another black silk in process of construction at that very moment; and yet

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she astonished her dress-maker by going next day to ask that it should be "something new in style, different from what I've had before, and more striking." It was still her second best for evening wear and she had it on to-night. It was slightly open at the throat and had white lace falling from the shoulders. Though she would never have owned to the weakness, she wore it rather than her best, on this occasion, because every one had told her that in it "she looked ten years younger."

Mrs. Wollaston did not exactly disapprove of Agatha's manner of dressing, she only wished it were different; and she felt the same about the girl's attitude towards young men. Her way of "accepting attentions" was unlike anything to which Mrs. Wollaston had been brought up. In the early sixties a girl who had been distinguished as Agatha had been distinguished by Paul Dunster and Anthony Muir would have displayed a certain surprised modesty. She would have shown herself flattered, fluttered, and taken off her guard. Even if she declined the civilities that were offered her she would have declined them in such a way as to make it clear that she took them for an honor. But to Agatha all such things were a matter of course. She seemed not so much to expect them as not to think of them at all. In situations where Mrs. Wollaston in her youth would have been tingling with a startled, pleasurable pride, Agatha manifested only a gracious indifference.

"Really, she goes about the world as if there were no such thing as marriage," Mrs. Wollaston had remarked to her husband not long ago. "One would say the young men were not worth a thought."

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"They're not," he had answered, laconically.

"They used to be, Hector."

"That was when I was young, my dear."

"It seems to me," she had gone on, in her gently sentimental way, "that if one has had the fortune to—to inspire an emotion, the least one can do is to treat it tenderly."

"Don't you worry about that," he had advised her. "The young men of to-day can take very good care of themselves. They're not inspired with emotions until they are ready for them. Even then they take only as much as they can stand, as a wise toper does with his glass."

Mrs. Wollaston had not agreed with this cynical view of life and did not now. As she looked at Paul Dunster she knew he was suffering as keenly as any old-time lover in romance. That he should be able to talk pleasantly with Agatha and jest with Persis and return an answer to the professor's jibes was all the nobler. Mrs. Wollaston felt that he had taken her lead and was doing his best to help in carrying off a difficult situation. As dinner drew towards the end she began to congratulate herself that nothing had been said that could hurt Mr. Dunster's feelings in any way. Agatha had behaved splendidly and so had Mr. Muir. Persis had shown an unusual discretion, while Hector seemed to have forgotten that an engagement had taken place.

It was when the fruit was being passed and Agatha had put out her hand to take a peach, that the bolt was shot from the blue.

"What's that ring you've got on?" the professor

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asked, suddenly. "Diamonds? I thought an unmarried woman shouldn't wear diamonds."

The three ladies exchanged quick and comprehending glances. Dunster turned to look at the ring. Muir smiled to himself and went on peeling a pear.

"Girls wear anything nowadays, Hector," Mrs. Wollaston explained, hastily.

"And Agatha is so soon to be married," Dunster laughed, rather forcedly, "that I should think she could wear all the diamonds she liked."

"Let me see it," Mr. Wollaston persisted, taking Agatha's hand and holding it up. "It's a new one, isn't it? I don't remember having seen it before."

"I only got it to-day," she laughed.

"How much?"

"I didn't buy it," she laughed again.

"Oh, Uncle Hector," Persis broke in, boldly, "do let her alone. It's her engagement-ring."

Mrs. Wollaston knew that for her it was a moment in which to dash in and save the situation.

"That reminds me," she said, turning to Muir, "that I've never told you how much I like your book. I read it while we were in the country, and told my husband that I thought it a most ennobling work. Didn't I, Hector?"

"Yes, she did, Muir," the old man corroborated. "She praised it up so much that I could hardly believe it yours."

"You mustn't mind that compliment, Mr. Muir," said Persis. "That's nothing to what Uncle Hector can do when he's in a really good humor."

"Don't be anxious on my account, Miss Wollaston," Muir rejoined, with an easy laugh. "No writer

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ought to be equal to his own books, otherwise he would always be standing with his best foot foremost."

"In an attitude naturally painful," Agatha added.

"A man who writes a book," said Dunster, more gravely than he had spoken hitherto, "should at least give to the world nothing but what's his own. And he shouldn't pass off as his own what belongs to some one else."

Muir glanced up quickly and seemed about to speak, but he ended in saying nothing.

"That's a hard question," Mr. Wollaston argued, taking the subject up. "It's sometimes difficult to decide as to what belongs to a man and what doesn't. I've often heard Emerson say that originality consists in making another man's thoughts one's own and giving them a new application."

"Quite so," Dunster agreed. "Ideas once offered to the world become common property. But each person who puts them forth should stamp them with the impress of himself. Otherwise they're borrowed, if not stolen. The same bit of gold may pass through many mints, but each time it comes out it is a different sort of coin."

"That's what struck me about Mr. Muir's book," said Mrs. Wollaston, who disliked discussion in the abstract. "It was so like him. As I read it I could almost hear him speak."

"I don't see how that could have been," the professor objected. "You never heard Muir say twenty words until we met him this afternoon and you asked him to come in to dinner."

"That may be so," she acknowledged, promptly,

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"but I knew he would have spoken that way if I had heard him."

Paul Dunster leaned across Mrs. Wollaston and looked at Muir a few seconds without speaking.

"Muir," he began, in a tone that drew every one's attention, "did you ever read a book on the same subject as your own by a Scotchman named Christopher Love?"

Again Muir looked up with a quick glance, but he answered, readily:

"No. Why?"

"Because there were things in your book that reminded me of his."

"I never heard of him," said Muir. "Is he a new man?"

"His book was published in 1831. It is entitled *A Treatise on the Human Conscience: Its Relation to Revealed Religion; and Its Influence on the Social Life of Men*. I suppose it must have come into the world top-heavy from its title, for it seems to have fallen very flat. The only copy I ever saw is that in my own possession. It came, I think, from your father's library, and bears the inscription, 'Andrew Muir, Edinburgh, 1831.'"

"That was my grandfather. I know my father had some of his books."

"I'll send it to you," Dunster went on, "if you would care to see it. But I should like to have it back."

"Thanks," Muir responded, indifferently. "Don't take the trouble. Some day when I'm over at Calverley Hall I'll run in to your room and take a look at it."

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"Christopher Love," Mrs. Wollaston commented. "What an odd name! It doesn't seem at all suited to a philosopher."

"Perhaps it was only a *nom de plume* like Christopher North," Agatha suggested.

"No doubt Muir can tell us," said Dunster.

"I'm afraid I can't," Muir answered. "I've just said that I've never heard it before."

"You did," Dunster persisted; "but I thought you might have recollected since. Names like that come back to one."

"So they do," Persis agreed. "I should make it the title for a novel. *Christopher Love*, by—'y—"

"By Paul Dunster," Muir said, with a laugh.

"Edited by Anthony Muir," Dunster rejoined, without laughing; and then the conversation took another turn.

Dinner was finished and bridge was played. Agatha's carriage came for her and she went away early. Muir lingered, but Dunster lingered too. In the end they left together.

"You're not going my way," Muir said, when the door had closed behind them. "I'll say good-night to you here."

"No; I'll walk a bit with you, if you don't object," Dunster answered. "I want a word with you about a matter that I've had on my mind for some days past."

"All right," Muir agreed. "I'm going straight to Westmorland Hall. It 'll take you out of your way, but—"

"It doesn't matter," said Dunster, as he lit a cigarette.

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He offered one to Muir, who declined it, and they set out slowly to walk across the Common.

"I've just heard," Dunster began, after a minute's hesitation, "that you're engaged to Miss Royal."

"I am."

"Then I want you to drop it."

"Did you say to drop *it* or to drop *you*?" Muir said, quietly.

"I mean that I want you to withdraw from your engagement to Miss Royal."

"In your favor?" Muir inquired, with a short laugh.

"No—not in my favor. I've no pretensions of that kind. I'm not thinking of myself—but of her—and you."

"Thank you for your interest, Dunster; but, as is hardly necessary to assure you, Miss Royal and I can do without it."

"And yet I'm going to thrust it on you."

"Look here, Dunster," Muir exclaimed, stopping in his walk and wheeling round, "what are you driving at? Any other man in my position would tell you to go to the devil, for a damned, impertinent ass. He'd say you were drunk: but I prefer to think you crazy. What are you up to? What do you mean? What have you been staring at me all the evening for? I'll be hanged if I can make you out."

"I mean nothing but what I say—that you must give up Miss Royal."

"Is that all?"

"No, it isn't all. You must go away from Harvard."

"Anything else?"

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"Nothing that I care about. So long as you do those two things I shall be satisfied. I sha'n't mind it, even if you go on foisting on the public other people's books."

Muir laughed again, in a short, hard way, and began moving on.

"I can't get out of temper with you, Dunster," he said, in a tone in which astonishment seemed to struggle with amusement. "You've been working too hard, or you've been taking drugs. I've heard you suffered from insomnia. You must be mentally unhinged."

"Don't try to bluff me, Muir. I'm not making a scene. I'm putting it to you quietly. Get out, where no one will hear of you again and I give you my word of honor that you shall never hear of me. You may get a place in one of the Western colleges; it's always a recommendation to a man to have taught at Harvard. If you do get one, I'll leave you alone, I promise you. I sha'n't split on you or utter a suspicion. All I ask of you is that you give up Miss Royal and—get out."

"You're modest in your demands, Dunster, and, for aught I know, you may be merciful. If I only had an inkling of what you mean I might feel in a more obliging frame of mind towards you."

"If that's all you need, I'll tell you; though I can't give you any information that you don't possess. The book of which you've sold over a hundred thousand copies you practically stole from an author unread in his lifetime and dead and gone and forgotten now, by the name of Christopher Love."

Muir gave a long, low whistle.

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"So that's it, Dunster, eh? A little bit of professional jealousy. Really, I'm rather ashamed of you; for, after all, you're a Harvard man, and belong to the English Department. But I give you a bit of advice: don't make yourself a reputation for trumping up charges of plagiarism against men who've beaten you in the field where you've tried to make a name. In the long run it doesn't pay. There's a man in Chicago, I believe, who says that Rostand stole from him *Cyrano de Bergerac*; but I never heard that it took one laurel leaf from Rostand's crown."

It was now Dunster's turn to stop.

"I've got the name of being quarrelsome," he said, in a voice trembling with the effort to keep his self-control, "and perhaps I deserve it. But I'm not going to quarrel now. I repeat only what I've said—that into the work you call yours you've put only the modification of a book published in 1831. You've made it more modern and more sentimental; you've introduced into it some odds and ends from Spencer and Lecky and Jacob Riis and Phillips Brooks. You've made an excellent compilation, but the material isn't yours."

"Don't you remember what was said at dinner? That originality consists in taking ideas from the common stock and working them up in your own way. Be reasonable, Dunster. If it comes to that, you're a plagiarist yourself. In every lecture you give you're only reporting what you've picked up here and there. When I wrote *Society and Conscience* I never supposed that nobody had ever expressed those thoughts before. It's true that I gave them a new twist—"

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"Oh no, you didn't, Muir," Dunster interrupted. "You copied them out just as they were. Literary theft may not exist for ideas, but it is concerned with words. In your book there are not only paragraphs, but whole pages taken from Christopher Love. No one but a fool would have done it. You must have been mad to suppose that some one wouldn't recognize them. I don't suppose that I'm the only one. It was your title for Section III.—'The Hebrew Conscience'—that first startled me. I recalled it from the old book into which I had dipped from time to time. When I turned to it there was not only the same title but the same words. The Hebrew quotations and authorities were the same. A curious mistake was copied out just as it stood. Line after line, for pages, there was not the difference of a comma. I saw at a flash that you couldn't have written a chapter like that. It's out of your beat. You haven't the information. You did the same with Section V.—'The Platonic Conscience.' I put the two side by side and read them together. You did the same throughout the book. At a guess I should say that a good third was copied as it stood from Christopher Love, with only the change of a bit of antiquated phraseology here and there. On the strength of that book you've made a reputation. On the strength of that book the noblest woman in the world has come to think you a remarkable man and is going to marry you. On the strength of that book you're reaping honor that isn't yours and pocketing money that doesn't belong to you. And the whole thing is a lie. Give it up, Muir. You're in an impossible position. Get out from here and save yourself while you can."

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"And if I don't?"

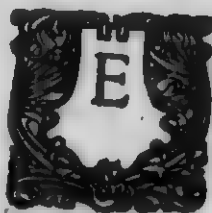
"Then, by God, I'll make you! I'll tear the heart out of your lying book and expose it to the world. There's nothing easier. I've only to publish twenty pages of old Christopher Love and the trick is done. I tell you, Muir, you have only to accept my conditions. Give up Miss Royal and get out. Steal away, sneak away, hide yourself, or else stand your ground till you're driven out. You've no other course."

"Oh yes, I have, Dunster," Muir said, with an easy laugh. "It is to let you do your little worst and be blown away by the tempest that you yourself will have conjured up. There's no funnier man on earth than the discoverer of mare's-nests and he's all the funnier when he's a foolish, blustering little chap like you. Bluster away, good Dunster. If it doesn't bring you fame, it will help you, at least, to a bit of notoriety. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll wish you a courteous good-night."

So saying, Muir turned on his heel and disappeared in the shadow of the trees. For a minute Dunster stood still where Muir had left him. He clinched his fists and bit his lips with suppressed anger.

"By God, I'll make him do it! I'll make him do it!" he muttered two or three times to himself. Then he, too, started off through the darkness on his way to his rooms in Calverley.

V



EARLY next morning Miss Agatha Royal was on her way up Brattle Street to the house of Cousin Abby Leggett. This was in execution of a plan long ago decided on. Ever since Agatha had taken up her residence in her own house, Mrs. Wollaston had urged on her the necessity of having some older woman to live with her. Agatha had smiled and agreed, but had done nothing. Mrs. Wollaston had pointed out that Providence seemed to have created Cousin Abby Leggett—a single woman with small means and no duties—expressly to be such a protectress as Agatha stood in need of. Again Agatha had smiled and acquiesced; but the years rolled by and she was still companionless. “You must be lonely,” Mrs. Wollaston often insisted.

“No,” Agatha would reply.

“And then if young men should come to the house?”

“Oh, but they don’t,” Agatha would answer, and the subject would drop fruitlessly again.

Now, however, circumstances were changed. Agatha had reached the moment she had foreseen. If young men ever should come to the house—one young man especially—she knew she would be obliged to call in the aid of Cousin Abby Leggett. She reasoned

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that it was a little ridiculous that it should be so and yet she yielded to the instinct which told her that Anthony Muir would be freer to come and go if Cousin Abby Leggett were there.

Agatha walked slowly, thinking out the new, small problems of her existence. It was a mellow October morning, full of peace and sunshine. Birds were flitting about her; a few late fruits still hung on the trees; dahlias, zinnias and chrysanthemums were brilliant in the gardens; here and there an immense hydrangea-bush was a mass of mystic blue. If you know Brattle Street you will recognize it at once as a fitting background for quiet thoughts. There is something in its leisurely winding—like that of a river meandering through a meadow—in its lawns, in its banks of shrubs, in its elms arching like cathedral aisles, in its comfortable, widely separated houses and in its memories of other days that encourages meditation. As the Thames rises amid gardens and amid gardens flows towards the sea, so Brattle Street rises among college halls and glides its quiet way along amid homes of leisure and learning till it loses itself in the fields. It is a street that has made history, as the Corso and Whitehall and the Rue St. Honoré have made history. Here, you say as you go by, the stately colonial gentlemen built up Tory Row; here they fought for a lost cause; here they listened to the guns of Lexington and hence they fled. In this house the Vassalls lived, in this house the Lees; in this house Riedesel was a prisoner; in this house Washington and his wife kept simple court and Longfellow spent his life; in this house Lowell was born and died.

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Agatha was not thinking of her surroundings as she walked along, but none the less they soothed her. She felt they stood for the best things. She felt the same of the whole trend of life in Old Cambridge. It was a satisfaction to her to belong to it. She was glad to have inherited its traditions—traditions of learning, high-mindedness and practical idealism.

"You would be worldly if you didn't live in Cambridge," Mrs. Wollaston had said to her once or twice and Agatha admitted that the remark was just. She knew that the atmosphere of good living in which she had grown up had counteracted a certain love of pleasure she recognized in herself. When Mr. Wollaston said, as he was fond of saying, "Cambridge keeps the nation's conscience," she felt proud of having even the humblest part in so responsible a task. She liked to remember, also, a remark by Anthony Muir, in that "Section" of his book in which he treats of the sense of moral responsibility among Americans. "Cambridge," he says, "takes the ore of the nation's material effort and crushes out the gold." She admired these sentiments. She felt it a privilege to belong to a community in which high thinking was still the ruling impulse, even though plain living was to some extent given up.

It was high thinking that had first attracted her in Muir. She had known him a year or two as a clever young man whom she was likely to meet at a dinner or a dance. He was one of the few men at Harvard who went much into society in Boston. He talked well and danced well and was very good-looking. It was always a pleasure to her to meet him, but she did not at first connect him with the more serious things

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in life. It was not until his book had appeared in the previous winter that she saw how profound a study he had made of the social and moral problems of the day. His view was broad, his grasp was firm, and over every topic on which he touched, from primitive ethics to Pennsylvania coal-strikes, he threw the charm of a style simple, dignified and direct. Dry subjects had never before been turned into such easy reading. *Society and Conscience* was in demand at all the public libraries and in all the women's clubs. Ladies who gave lectures in drawing-rooms made it the subject of their "talks" and clergymen commended from the pulpit that earlier portion of the work in which the origin and development of conscience as a directing force in life is so wonderfully depicted.

It was in vain that the *National* and other serious reviews called it an industrious second-hand accomplishment; it was in vain that Muir's Harvard colleagues spoke of it as "an appeal to the half-educated"; *Society and Conscience* pleased the public, which is no small thing to do and passed with many for an ennobling if not an epoch-making work.

The sympathy Agatha had hitherto felt for Muir, on the ground that whatever he did he did well, now took a more serious turn. When she saw that the man who danced so divinely could quote Hebrew like an ancient prophet she naturally drew the conclusion that he was unusual. When she understood that the aim of his life was to elevate the poor and purify the rich and lift the whole tone of American life to the highest plane, she knew he had the same aspirations as herself. When they met it was inevitable that they

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should speak of the subjects both of them had at heart and so be drawn closer together. Agatha found Muir's conversation a positive stimulation after the inanities of other young men. She read books on social topics in order to keep pace with him. She broadened her lines of study so as to understand something of the difficulties between labor and capital, of civil-service reform, and of the housing of the poor. When she did not understand, it was Muir's opportunity to explain. He explained well. He not only made a subject clear, but, in the most delicate fashion, he turned the dull and abstract into the personal and warm. Agatha came to look up to him as she had never expected to look up to any man. Little by little she learned to think of him as one to whom she could submit herself.

"Agatha must marry either a strong man who will master her, or a weak one whom she can master," had been Mrs. Wollaston's often-expressed opinion; and now the strong man seemed to have come. When he confided to her his plans for the new book he was sketching out she took the action for an honor; when he asked her advice on this point or that, she felt that life could offer no greater privilege than to help such a man in his tasks. After that the rest had come as a matter of course and so, when, two days ago, Muir had asked her to be his wife, she had only one answer to give. It seemed to her that such a marriage offered her not only happiness, but the chance of being useful. To marry for happiness alone would have fallen short of her gracefully Puritan ideal. So, as she entered Cousin Abby Leggett's modest, semi-detached dwelling in Riedesel Avenue, Agatha was content both

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with the present moment and with the future she saw shaping itself before her.

She found Cousin Abby, shrouded in a large, white apron, in the act of dusting her East India china and old, carved, colonial furniture. After the first greetings had been exchanged and they had sat down, Agatha plunged into her subject by saying she had come to invite her kinswoman to pay her a long visit.

"Of course I'll come," Miss Leggett said at once. She cooed the words out of a luxuriantly double chin and gave them a tone of rich, comforting assurance. She was a Juno-like person in whom stateliness was softened by an air of brisk and motherly competence. She was one of the few persons of whom Agatha was afraid. Her commanding ways would have made her a person of importance even if she had not been one of the Salem Leggetts. This last fact not only gave her a patent of nobility no one could dispute, but also entitled her to speak her mind with a freedom impossible to any one with a less distinguished circle of kinship. No one in Massachusetts, she was accustomed to boast, had more relations, or was oftener in mourning, than herself. She was cousin to the Royals as well as to the Wollastons and old families that had no other connecting link found one in her.

"Of course I'll come," she repeated. "I've often wondered why you didn't ask me before."

"I wish I had," Agatha acknowledged, readily.

"For a young girl like you to live alone couldn't but be distressing to her friends, whatever it may have been to herself."

"I didn't mean to do it always," Agatha said, in self-excuse.

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"I should hope not. Your poor father would never have allowed it, nor your poor mother, either."

"I didn't know that," Agatha pleaded, again.

"Well, I did," Cousin Abby declared. "I've often wondered what Cousin Fanny Wollaston could be thinking of not to have spoken to you about it."

"Mrs. Wollaston wasn't to blame. She did speak of it, but I suppose I was headstrong. In any case, Cousin Abby," she continued, looking up with an appealing smile, "you see I've repented and so I hope you'll come and stand by me till—till—"

"Till what? Out with it."

"Till a very trying ceremony is over."

"Ah, that's it!" Miss Leggett cried, in her rich contralto. "So I'm to come and throw the shield of my respectability over a questionable situation. I'm a foolish old woman, otherwise I should refuse. You invite me not from love, but from necessity, and if I were to serve you right—"

"I knew you'd be too good to do that," Agatha slipped in.

"It's well for you that I am. I will come and I'll watch my chance to punish you in some other way. Now, who is it to be to?" she asked, ungrammatically. "But I suppose I know that already. Cousin Mary Dunster has been counting on it for some time."

"Oh, it isn't that," Agatha exclaimed, hurriedly.

"Not that! Why not?" Cousin Abby demanded, imperiously. She disliked being put in the wrong.

"There has never been any question of it," Agatha exclaimed.

"But there *has* been question of it. We've all talked of it. The very last time I saw Cousin Fanny

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Wollaston we agreed that it was as near as strawberry-time in June."

"Well, it wasn't," was all Agatha could find to say.

"Then why not?" Miss Leggett asked again. "At least you owe it to me to tell me that."

"I will tell you, Cousin Abby. There are two reasons, but one will be enough. He never asked me."

"That does explain it," Miss Leggett admitted with a laugh. "And now if he didn't, who did?"

"That's what I've come to tell you, Cousin Abby."

"Tell it, then. I can't imagine who it can be."

"It's Mr. Anthony Muir."

"What! The writer man?"

"He's in the English Department in the university," Agatha explained. "He does write."

"I never read books myself, but I keep track of them by what other people say. And now, I come to think of it, I've been reading something about your very man this morning. Let me see. Where was it? It must have been in one of the papers. It was in the *National*, I think. I looked over it at breakfast."

"Mine came, but I didn't open it," Agatha said.

"It's in the dining-room. I'll go and look for it."

"They never say anything very nice about him," Agatha remarked, as her cousin rose.

"And this wasn't," Miss Leggett called back from the dining-room. "Here it is," she continued, as she returned. "I thought it must have been in the *National*. It's a letter signed 'Christopher Campbell Love.'"

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Agatha started at the name. It had a familiar sound, though she could not remember where she had heard it.

"I'll read it to you," Miss Leggett went on, sinking into her chair again.

"Please do," Agatha assented. She was always eager to know what the papers said of Muir.

Miss Leggett settled herself and read:

"To the Editor of the 'National.'"

"DEAR SIR,—In reading that much-discussed book, *Society and Conscience*, by Mr. Anthony Muir, of Harvard University, I find myself impressed, I had better say astounded, by the resemblance between large portions of that work and *A Treatise on the Human Conscience*, published in 1831, and written by my grandfather, the late Christopher Love. Mr. Love was at that time Professor of Ethical Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. Owing to circumstances which I cannot explain, the work on which he spent much learning and labor passed almost unnoticed by the press and wholly so by the public. The family of Mr. Love had grown to consider the book as entirely forgotten, when they now see it rescued from oblivion by Mr. Anthony Muir. The most casual reader cannot compare the two works without seeing at a glance that the one is largely a reproduction of the other. The resemblances are so many that no theory of chances can explain them. It is difficult to give instances when the similarity is not only between sentences and paragraphs, but between chapters taken as a whole; and on this occasion I content myself with demanding an explanation from Mr. Muir. Should he be unwilling or unable to give one, I shall take such steps that the public at large may be in a position to judge of the truth of what I say. Thanking you for allowing me so much space, believe me, dear sir,

Yours truly,

"CHRISTOPHER CAMPBELL LOVE,

"Feesbles Professor of Greek,

"University of Detroit."

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"How base!" was Agatha's first exclamation.

"It wouldn't be base if it was true," Cousin Abby observed. "It's natural that the family should want to claim their ancestor's work."

"But it's preposterous!" Agatha cried, again. "It's absurd on the face of it."

"It may be absurd in fact," Miss Leggett said, "but I don't see that it is on the face of it."

"You don't know Anthony, otherwise you wouldn't say so."

"But I hope to know him, and then, no doubt, I shall be less impartial. In the mean time," she added, throwing the paper aside and dismissing the whole subject as of no importance—"in the mean time I haven't congratulated you."

"You can't if you believe that thing," Agatha said, pointing to the review lying on the floor.

"But I don't," Miss Leggett laughed. "I only keep myself open to conviction from either side. In any case I can hope that you may be very happy. That commits me to nothing."

They rose and kissed each other. Agatha noted that Cousin Abby's formula was identical with Paul Dunster's on the evening before.

"They all wish well to me," she said to herself, "but they leave Anthony out."

It was settled that Miss Leggett should arrive after luncheon, and Agatha went away. As she walked down Brattle Street her thoughts were less pleasant than they had been a half-hour before. The name of "Christopher Campbell Love" still haunted her with a half-recollection, as though she had heard it in a dream. She walked rapidly, eager to reach home and

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read the letter for herself. As she went onward the sunshine was harder than it had been just now, the birds annoyed her by their aimless flittings among the trees, and it seemed foolish of the flowers to be blooming still when summer was at an end.

VI



MUIR received the first intimation of the letter in the *National* while lunching that morning at his club-table. It was conveyed by Parker Stubbs of the English Department, who threw it out as a topic of general interest, while he ate rapidly, with his head in his plate.

"I see the *National* has been walking into you again," he began at once, as soon as Muir had taken his place at table.

"I should think they'd soon get tired of that," Muir returned, indifferently.

"Let's hope that for your sake they won't," came from Fisher, the young instructor in history. "It keeps your book before the public and helps to sell it."

"That's true," Muir agreed. "Better that they should keep hammering at me than that they should say nothing."

"This time," mumbled Stubbs, "it isn't the *National* itself in its own many-headed and many-handed personality; it's the Peebles Professor of Greek at the University of Detroit."

"Oh, Love," threw in Glynn, of the Latin Department, "I know him. He's a Columbia man."

"Hail Columbia is what he threatens to give Muir,"

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Stubbs went on. "He accuses him of stealing a bit of his own family property."

"Never heard of the gentleman," Muir said, with admirable self-control, as he helped himself to the cutlets.

"Well, Love seems to insist on your making his acquaintance," Stubbs pursued

"Happy to meet him any time he likes," Muir replied, with the same air of indifference. "Did anybody go to see Jennison in 'Hamlet' last night? I was dining out and couldn't."

"I did," said Glynn. "It was a good deal as if John the Orangeman had played it."

So the conversation turned and did not touch on the *National* again. Muir was careful not to let it be seen that his curiosity was roused, but on leaving the table he returned hurriedly to his rooms. The accusing document was lying there unopened and he tore the band apart with fingers that almost trembled in their haste.

The *National* is generally admitted to be the most authoritative weekly publication in the United States. It is not a newspaper, it is a review. It belongs to a class of literary journalism of which London, Paris and Berlin can show a good many examples, though the continent of America contents itself with one or two. Being almost without a competitor, the *National* can be as prosy as it likes, and yet speak for the new world as the *Spectator*, the *Athenæum*, and the *Saturday* taken together cannot speak for the old. The most able men in politics, science, literature and art contribute to its pages and if the result is dull the dulness is of a superior quality. Though the *Na-*

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tional issues from New York, yet, as the organ of the intellectual classes, it is read by every well-informed person in Old Cambridge. Many of its articles come from the older professors, while the younger ones contribute book-reviews. Its lightest word is, therefore, of some importance, especially in those university circles where reading and writing are serious aims.

Muir turned the pages as he stood, running his eye up and down the columns until he caught his own name. He turned to the signature before reading the letter. "Christopher Campbell Love." The words seemed to leap out at him, and he half drew back as from an apparition. Then he recovered himself and read the letter through. When he had finished it he took a turn around the room, his head bent and his hands behind him. Coming back to the table, he picked up the review and read the letter through once more. Then he strolled to the mantel-piece and began fingering the bits of carved ivory on it. A minute later he pushed them away and lit a cigarette. Throwing himself into a chair he smoked absently, while his eyes traced the aimless pattern on an Oriental rug. Suddenly he looked at his watch. "I shall be late for my lecture," he said to himself, and sprang up. But he stood for a moment, still reflecting. "After all," he said to himself again, "my stand is taken. I took it last night. There's no modification of it nor retreat from it. I know nothing whatever about it. I have only to let Paul Dunster and Christopher Campbell Love and any one else who chooses to join with them, blow till they blow their brains out."

As he picked up his hat his eye fell on the crumpled copy of the *National*. "I sha'n't have that thing

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lying here," he said, "in case any one drops in." He folded it and put it in a drawer, but before he turned the key a second thought came to him. "No," he reflected, "that isn't my game. I've got nothing to hide or to be afraid of. The frank and open is the line I've got to take. There!" he exclaimed aloud, as he flung the paper from the table back on the table again. "He who runs may read and be damned to him!"

When he descended to the street he walked with his head more defiantly erect than ever, while his eyes flashed and the color mounted to his cheek. As he crossed the Yard it seemed to him as if all acquaintances he met were thinking of the charge brought against him that morning and that even the students in his lecture-room would be discussing it among themselves. But he was a Scotchman and his fighting blood was up. He felt himself able to bear down, by his own personality, everything in the way of suspicion, criticism, or accusation.

He felt so still when, in the evening, after dinner, Agatha also introduced the subject of the letter in the *National*. They were sitting alone in the Louis XV. drawing-room, for Miss Leggett had left them to themselves.

"Have you seen this?" Agatha asked, just touching with her fan the paper that lay on the table beside which they sat.

"I opened it this morning," he admitted; "but I was busy and didn't have time to give it much attention. May I glance at it again?"

He took the review languidly and looked it through. Agatha watched him as he read.

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"And this is what my vanity has come to!" he laughed, when he had finished. "I who fondly thought I had struck a new vein of inquiry find that it is only one abandoned as long ago as 1831. Ah, me! How we poor mortals follow in each other's tracks! Anthony Muir must march on the heels of Christopher Love, as Christopher Love on the heels of some one else."

"Oh, but, Anthony, you don't think that there can be—"

"Any resemblance between the two books? Quite possibly. Everybody is always anticipated. Archaeologists are discovering every day that some of our most vaunted modern inventions—gold-filling in teeth, for instance—were known to the ancients. History passes in cycles. Ideas come round in regular rotation once in so often, like the fashions in women's clothes. It may be that just as the styles of 1830 have been more or less in vogue of late years, so it is with discussion of the human conscience. After a lapse of two generations, both, for some curious psychological reason, may have reached the moment of resuscitation. I believe I could write an article for the *National* myself, with that as a text. 1830: the downfall of the House of Bourbon; the death of George IV.; the rise of the Romantic School; the beginning of the Oxford Movement. Then the passage of threescore years and ten—the regulation time. It would be only natural if the same trend of thought were to come round again. I must work it up, dear, and I'll buy you a present with what the *National* pays me."

They both laughed and he threw the review carelessly on the table.

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"But what shall you do about it?" Agatha asked.

"About what, dearest?"

"About this letter."

"Oh, nothing. Christopher Love is dead. Let him stay dead."

"Then you won't write to the *National*?"

"Not a bit. What for?"

"To say you never heard of Christopher Love."

"That wouldn't do any good, dear. Besides, I make it a rule never to reply to criticisms of my work."

"Still, I should think you'd write," she persisted, gently.

"If I did, I should only be playing into the good man's hand. I don't know him, but I should guess that he was one of those gentleman who enjoy the mild dissipation of newspaper correspondence. I don't; and so I shall enshroud myself in a dignified, golden silence."

"But if he goes on, Anthony?"

"Then he shall beat the idle air; I, meanwhile, sitting dumb and enigmatic like the Sphinx."

"I must say that I admire that attitude as a rule," Agatha said, without much conviction in her tone; "but in this case—"

"There is no sound so distressing as the clashing of pens," he interrupted. "The shock of arms, the rattling of chains and even the jangling of sweet bells out of tune and harsh may have in them something of the noble or poetic; but the smiting of one man's quill against another's is nearly always a petty and feeble form of warfare carried on for petty and personal aims. In that sort of fight they'd have to hit

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me pretty hard before I should be tempted to hit back."

"Well, isn't this hitting pretty hard?" she asked, barely arching her eyebrows and again touching the copy of the *National* with her fan.

"You think so, dear," he explained, "because you're always indignant with anything that pitches into me. But I'm used to it. When one appears in any way before the public one has to remember that one can only please a limited number. No one can do more. And every one whom one doesn't please has a right to speak his mind about one's performance. That right one has to recognize and accept in philosophical silence."

"It's curious," Agatha said, moving to another point, "that Paul Dunster should have mentioned the same name last night."

"Not so very. I've no doubt, as I said before, that I've been following in another man's wake without knowing it. Such things have happened before and will happen again. That wouldn't detract, however, from the value of my work or make me in any way answerable to people who amuse themselves by trumping up charges."

Agatha did not pursue the subject further. She admired Muir's lofty disdain of attack and she was eager to accept his opinion as the right one. But in this instance she could not rid herself of a curious misgiving. As they talked of other things her thoughts kept reverting to the previous point. Though she argued that he must be the best judge of what to do, her heart was heavy with a contrary conviction. "It's noble of him to be so splendidly in-

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different," she told herself; but none the less she knew she would have been glad if he had showed greater concern.

She felt this more strongly after he went away. When the door closed behind him she turned from it with a sense that the evening had been a failure. It was the first evening they had spent together under her own roof—the roof that was one day to be his—and she had looked forward to it as the beginning of a more intimate phase in their relations to each other; but somehow, now that it was over, and she stood alone in the silent hall, she had a strange feeling that they were farther apart. She reproached herself for it and tried to shake it off. As she went slowly down the hall to the library she did her best to encounter Cousin Abby Leggett without looking as if something had gone wrong.

"Well?" Miss Leggett questioned, glancing up from the evening paper as Agatha entered the room. "Has the silver skiff pulled up at the door for Lohengrin?"

"Mr. Muir has gone home, if that's what you mean, Cousin Abby," Agatha said, seating herself with dignity in one of the green-and-gold, Empire arm-chairs.

"That's what I mean, but the plain language seemed to me inappropriate."

"I hope you haven't been disappointed in him?"

"Not disappointed, only disconcerted," Miss Leggett laughed. "He's put all my usual tests for judging men out of joint. I couldn't be more bewildered if I were the classical lady before whom Jupiter came down as a shower of gold."

"Didn't you think him nice?"

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"Nice! I thought him heavenly. I haven't had a man show me so much attention since I was a girl with a figure and a color like Persis Wollaston's. Why, he positively included me in the conversation and held the door open for me when I left the room. I couldn't help asking myself all the time, 'What's Harvard coming to if the young men are going to be courteous to old women?' There never was such a thing known in the university before."

"Any one can see that Anthony is a gentleman," Agatha said, coloring with pride.

"And a lady's gentleman," Miss Leggett added. "He knows just how to take us in our weaknesses. He could tell at a glance that a little attention would flatter me into a state of mental incapacity, and it has. So, if you want to know my opinion of him, my dear, I'm in no fit state to give it."

"You mustn't think he isn't sincere, Cousin Abby."

"I'm sure I don't want to think it. And yet no true New England woman can see a man with such very good manners and not be a little suspicious."

"Suspicious of what?"

"Of nothing in particular and of everything in general. It makes me feel as I do when I see a woman wearing a beautiful string of pearls; I can't help wondering if they are real. If your Anthony Muir is all he seems to be, then I can only say that he is worth his weight in gold."

"I think you will find that what he is superficially he is throughout."

"I should call that too good to be true. In your place I shouldn't count on it, for you're sure to be disappointed."

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Agatha smiled and shook her head.

"I know him too well," she said. "He's one of the men from whom you can look for great things, but who will always give you greater."

"One of the men! My dear, if he's like that he's the only one; he's unique. Really you make me suspicious in spite of myself. Just to hear you say so makes me wild to find out what's wrong with him."

"There's nothing wrong with him," Agatha declared, with confidence.

"There's somebody up in Detroit who thinks there is. Have you forgotten what was in the paper about him only this morning?"

Miss Leggett spoke jestingly, but Agatha ceased to smile.

"He was perfectly splendid about that," she said, pensively.

"Oh, he'd be splendid about anything. That's his style. That's what has dazzled me. He'd be splendid if he was picking your pocket or cutting your throat. I suppose on this occasion he was splendid in righteous indignation."

"No. He was splendid in his simplicity, in his fairness and in his open-mindedness."

"And you're sure it wasn't put on?"

"Oh, Cousin Abby!"

"Well, the young men put on so much nowadays. They're nothing but a superficies of veneer. Paul Dunster is the only one in whom you can see the natural grain of the wood, and that's rough. What's your Anthony going to do about the Peebles Professor of Greek?"

"Nothing."

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"Nothing? That's beautifully non-committal, but it's an attitude likely to be misunderstood. Ill-natured people will think he says nothing because he has nothing to say."

"He makes it a rule never to reply to criticisms of his work."

"I shouldn't call this a criticism so much as an accusation."

Agatha flushed and moved uneasily. It was the expression of the thought she herself had not dared to formulate.

"He holds himself above all that," she answered. "Shots that would wound other men seem to pass below him."

"That's a most convenient altitude at which to live. Very few of us are able to get above the moral cloud-belt once or twice in a life-time; but actually to stay up there is almost equal to having wings."

"You needn't be satirical, Cousin Abby," Agatha said, in a tone slightly of offence. "The more you know Anthony, the more you will see that he does live in a spiritual atmosphere higher than our own."

"Now, my dear, I don't doubt it," Miss Leggett exclaimed, in her hearty way. She threw down the evening paper, and, rising, came and stood looking down at the girl. "He certainly seems to be a most engaging young man. From what I could see this evening, he is a judicious mixture of Phoebus Apollo and Ralph Waldo Emerson; and so if any man has a right to live above our heads it's he. But if I were you I'd try to get him down just once—just once and just long enough to fire one fatal shot at Christopher Campbell Love, after which he would be free to soar

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back again. I'm sure he could do it easily enough, and it would be a relief to all our minds."

Agatha laughed nervously and rose, too.

"I'm sure he knows best," she declared, loyally, as she went about the room putting out the lights.

They kissed each other and said good-night. Miss Leggett went up-stairs, but Agatha lingered a moment in the darkened library.

"A relief to all our minds," she quoted. "That means they are thinking about it. They're afraid I'm taking a false step. They suspect Anthony of having stolen the book. Then this is my opportunity to show that I believe in him."

As she went up-stairs there was something of Muir's own air of haughty defiance in her look and bearing.

IT was natural that Agatha should be curious as to what the Wollastons thought of her engagement. Though she was free to act without their consent, she could not be happy without their approval. A few days before, she had felt certain of getting it, but the small events of the last forty-eight hours had raised in her mind an uncomfortable shadow of doubt.

"Do you think they really like it?" she asked, anxiously, of Persis, when the girl came on some trifling errand next morning.

"Don't ask me," Persis answered, dropping languidly into a large, chintz-covered arm-chair in Agatha's bedroom. "I'm the last person to know. I'm the young thing who must never be told anything."

"Still, I thought you might have gathered—"

"Gathered! You might as well expect to gather roses on the sea-beach as to get at what Uncle Hector and Aunt Fanny think about other people's affairs. Death itself isn't more guarded or silent or discreet."

"Do you know if they read yesterday's number of the *National*?" Agatha questioned, as she moved about the room picking up little articles of apparel and arranging them in drawers.

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"From the fact that they've not said anything about it I presume they have."

"Have you, Persis?"

"Yes, and I saw the letter about Mr. Muir. I mentioned it at lunch and I knew by the way they didn't take the subject up that they'd been talking it over between themselves. I expect Mr. Muir's answer will be great fun."

"He isn't going to write one," Agatha said, trying to speak indifferently.

"Isn't he? I wish he would."

"So do I," Agatha admitted; "but that's the sort of battle in which he doesn't think it dignified to defend himself."

"Do you know what I'd do, if I were you?" Persis rattled on. "I'd get Paul Dunster to write it up. You know he's got a book all about it. He said so at dinner the night before last."

Agatha paused in her work and looked at Persis.

"So he did," she said, thoughtfully. "I'd forgotten it, but I remember now. He said he'd lend it to Anthony."

"Well, if he's got the book," Persis went on, "he could write it up and give the Detroit man fits."

"That's true," Agatha agreed, "and it might be better than if Anthony did it himself. Still, I don't think I'll ask him."

"I would, if I were you," Persis urged. "He'd love to do it for you."

Agatha turned the conversation by asking when she would be likely to find Mr. Wollaston alone, for a few minutes' conversation.

"Let me see," Persis reflected. "To-day is Thurs-

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day and he comes home early. Aunt Fanny will be at her Bee and I shall be pouring tea for Mrs. Arlington Revere. I should think if you came about four you'd have Uncle Hector entirely at your mercy."

"Don't tell him I'm coming," Agatha charged, as Persis went away. "I'll take my chance of finding him."

When she arrived she received a heartier welcome than she expected. She was taken into the study and made to sit in the arm-chair, while the professor drew his seat close up to hers.

"I'm glad you've come to-day," he said, "because Fanny's at her Bee—the bumble Bee, I call it, for from all I hear they do nothing but gossip under pretence of working for the poor. That's nothing to me, however, so long as it takes Fanny out of the way for an hour or two a week. I don't care if they do gossip. I shouldn't care if they committed murder. I get the house to myself and that's the essential."

"But Mrs. Wollaston is so good!" Agatha protested.

"Of course she's good. Why shouldn't she be? She's never lived anywhere but in Cambridge and in the heart of the college, so to speak. That's enough to make anybody good. You'd be good yourself if you had done that. Perhaps some day you will."

"I hope to," Agatha admitted, with a smile.

"So I suppose. But are you sure you are setting the right way to work about it?"

"Perfectly sure," she replied, with a confident lifting of the head.

"I'm glad to hear that—very glad, indeed. I half expected you to feel differently. So did Mrs. Wollaston, if she'd speak out."

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"I don't see why. You approve of my engagement, don't you?"

"On general principles, yes. It's time you were getting married. You're not so very young and I rather think you're beginning to lose your looks. I don't say you're going off, mind you," he hastened to explain. "I mean only that you're the style of girl that ages early. You're so tall and you've got that high color. Now, Fanny doesn't look ten years older than when we were married. You'll never wear like that."

"No, of course not," Agatha agreed, modestly.

"Which makes it all the more important that you should settle soon. I do approve of your getting engaged—to some one."

"Then I hope Mr. Muir will do as well as another."

"No doubt, no doubt. I'm not sure that I have any well-founded objection to Muir."

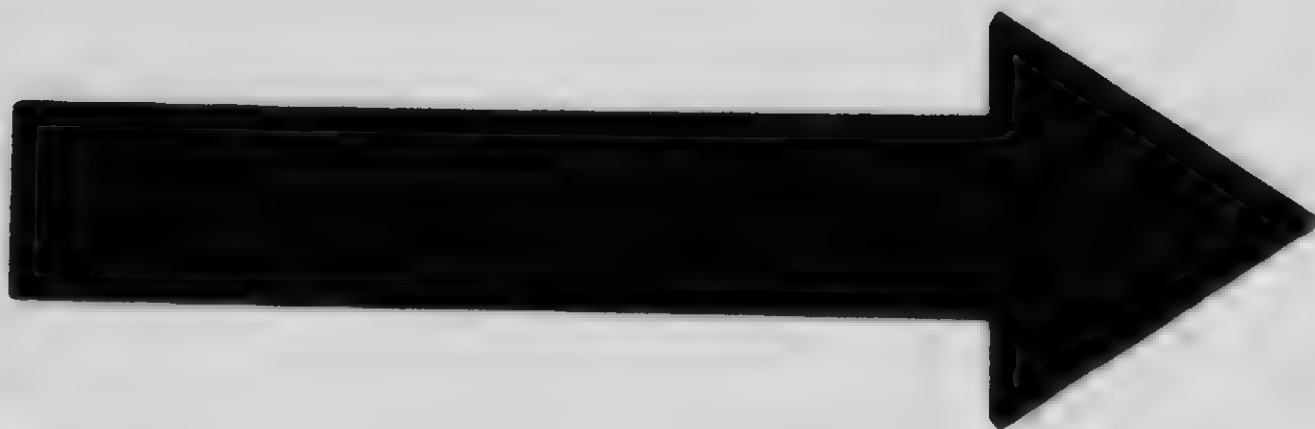
"Or ill-founded?"

"I've no objection to him at all," the professor declared—"that is, for an engagement," he added, in qualification. "But an engagement isn't a marriage."

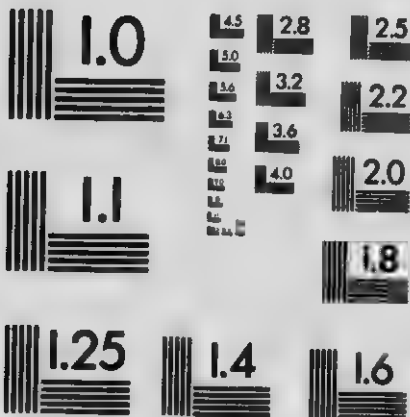
"Naturally," Agatha murmured, in assent.

"Now, I consider the engagement, as an institution, a wise provision of society. It is tentative and experimental. There's nothing final and conclusive and irrevocable about it. I'm not sure if it isn't an excellent plan to be engaged a good many times before taking the last step of all."

"Oh!" Agatha exclaimed, softly. The point of view was novel to her. Claspings her white-gloved hands in her lap she bent forward in an attitude of attention.



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"Yes," Mr. Wollaston went on, "I should say that it was an especially wise plan for a young woman. She's under one great disadvantage, and it's this: the man doesn't have to speak till he's ready, but a girl must be often in the position of getting an offer that's too good to say no to, though she may not be sure that she wants to say yes."

"But any nice girl, Mr. Wollaston—"

"Just let me go on, my dear. In that case, let her get engaged, I say. That doesn't commit her to anything. Whenever she likes she's at liberty to withdraw."

"But I don't think so," Agatha objected, eagerly. "No girl should accept a man without meaning to marry him."

"If he suits her," the professor added; "certainly not. But you can't get rid of that condition; it wouldn't be common-sense. And all I want to suggest to you is this, that you mustn't feel yourself bound to take the first comer—"

"Oh, but I didn't," she interrupted and then stopped herself with a blush.

"Well, perhaps you didn't. That's neither here nor there. For all I know you may have had two or three offers before Muir's. Did you?"

The question was so direct that Agatha was startled into an admission.

"More," she said, and checked herself again.

"Then you might have done well to take some of them—temporarily, I mean; you'd have had had more experience. You wouldn't be so likely to fall an easy victim. I must say, Agatha, I've had high hopes of you. I feel more or less like a father to

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you and so does Fanny. It's natural that we should. We didn't expect you to do anything hasty—"

"I assure you I haven't."

"Or to think that just because a man doesn't offer himself at the first opportunity he doesn't mean to do it at all."

"I'm not sure that I understand you, Mr. Wollaston."

"Oh yes, you do. I needn't speak a bit more plainly. Yours isn't an uncommon case by any means. All the older literatures are full of just such instances—the maiden's heart caught on the rebound by the man who wasn't the one she fancied. The story is quite a primitive one and makes very pretty mediæval poetry, but it isn't practical enough for to-day."

"May I ask," she inquired, speaking slowly, "if you think I don't care for Mr. Muir?"

"Not at all—not at all. I shouldn't venture to say that for a moment; neither would Fanny. One can care for different people in different ways. I'm not talking about Muir at all. I'm only saying that if Paul Dunster is slow he's sure. He may not be very good-looking; but looks are only of secondary importance in a man, after all. I know he's short and that he has a cast in one of his eyes; but that ought not to weigh with a sensible girl like you."

"Of course it wouldn't," she said, with a touch of indignation. "I've always found Mr. Dunster a charming man; but you mustn't think on that account that I feel anything more for him than—"

"That's what I said to Fanny," he broke in. "I said it was as plain as daylight the way you felt. I

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could see that when you went off in a hurry to Europe last year. 'It's nothing but a tiff between them,' I said, 'and it will come right in the end'; and Fanny agreed with me. Oh, you young minxes think that we old people can't read you. My dear, we've been through it all. And what I want to say to you is this: that there's no harm done. You've been getting your experience, that's all. With regard to Mr. Muir, you're only in the experimental stage. You're not obliged to go any further. You've put one foot on the ice, but you've got the other one on shore. Finding that the ice won't bear you, you draw back. You've not only got a right to do it, but there's no other sensible course before you. Muir will get over it. Don't have any alarm about that. He's one of those lady-killers that are always ready for a change."

"You're under an entire misapprehension, Mr. Wollaston. He isn't that kind of man. I wish I could tell you how noble and good he is. You must have seen that from his book, if you've read it."

"I've glanced at it. It's a little choppy, but it isn't a bad book. It's curiously antiquated here and more curiously modern there, but that's not against it."

"And he's been so maliciously attacked. Have you read this?" She leaned across the table and picked up the copy of the *National*. "Isn't it shameful that such things should be allowed to get into print?"

"I've seen it. The charge is rather a strong one. I suppose Muir will know how to answer it."

"He isn't going to answer it at all."

"Ah!" the professor interjected, thrusting out his underlip.

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"He laughed at it."

"Ah!"

"He treats it with scorn."

"Really? I'm surprised at that. I know something about Love, of Detroit, and I should call him a rather dogged opponent." There was an expression in his face that startled Agatha.

"You—you don't think," she said, speaking hard'y, "that there can be anything in it?"

"Possibly not."

"But you mean, possibly yes?"

"I don't say that. I limit myself to thinking that the tug-of-war between Love and Muir will be an interesting exhibition of strength."

"But if Anthony won't engage in it?"

"Then Love will keep at him till he does. If I were you, my dear, I'd do the same. It isn't as if the accusation—"

Agatha raised her hand with a protesting movement at the word.

"It isn't as if the accusation," the old man repeated, deliberately, "came from any one anonymous or obscure. Love, of Detroit, isn't a negligible quantity in the world of letters. If he goes on talking, Muir won't be able to keep silent."

"He says he will."

"Well, he knows his own business best. In any case, we've nothing to do with it. We've only got to sit still and look for the outcome. It will give you more time to make preparations for your wedding—if you get married."

"I shouldn't put my marriage off for this," Agatha said, hotly.

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"No, of course not. I shouldn't advise that at all; neither would Fanny. You'd only not fix the date for a while—just till—till we'd see. You'll enjoy your engagement all the more by spinning it out."

"I see you don't believe in Anthony."

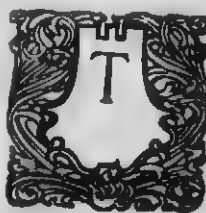
"I don't believe in any one, my dear. I don't even believe in Fanny. For aught I know, she's a perfect Cleopatra. And that's the way I should advise you to feel about Muir. Don't begin your life by believing in people, for you'll be cruelly disillusioned. Mind you, I don't say Muir is a bit worse than anybody else. I'm only cautioning you against putting your faith in any one so long as you can get up a suspicion against them."

"I shall never suspect Anthony, Mr. Wollaston."

"Then you'll be a very foolish girl. Look at Fanny. She's suspected me every hour in the day and I've spent my life throwing dust in her eyes. Depend upon it, Muir is doing the same with you, and you'll not be the woman I take you for if you let yourself be blinded."

Beyond this Agatha got no satisfaction. As she returned homeward, a half-hour later, she felt, more than ever, that around the man she had promised to marry there had risen a strange atmosphere of distrust which she was powerless to dispel. It was even creeping into her own regard for him, though she knew it was at just such a moment as this that all her principles of loyalty and duty called on her to be true.

VIII



THE next week's number of the *National* had no reference to Anthony Muir. Agatha breathed more freely. The slight buzz of gossip the letter had caused died down. The few people interested began to talk of something else. Anthony was in high spirits, and Agatha and he made plans for their marriage early in December. Then a new number of the *National* appeared with a second letter. In it the writer expressed his surprise that his challenge had not been taken up and asked permission to give a few comparative extracts from the pages of Anthony Muir and Christopher Love. The passages were printed side by side and the impartial reader was called upon to judge.

The immediate effect upon Anthony Muir's acquaintance was to create a feeling of surprise. People who had paid no attention to the first letter read the second and talked of it. Public interest itself began to stir. What does it mean? the readers of the *National* asked each other. It was clear that between the two works there was an astonishing similarity and admirers of *Society and Conscience* began to forecast the probable explanations of the author. At the great free public libraries there were fruitless inquiries after *A Treatise on the Human Conscience* and the

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name of Christopher Love was heard with a frequency that would have flattered the owner of it seventy years before.

"Now, Anthony must speak," Agatha said to herself, when she read the *National* in the morning. "I must use all my influence to make him."

"I hoped you would have invited Paul Dunster," she said to Muir, as they drew near Harvard Bridge late in the afternoon of the same day. She did not dare approach her topic otherwise than indirectly.

"Why?" Muir asked.

"Because I'm fond of him."

"That's a sufficient reason for my keeping him away. When I give a tea-party I don't want any one you're fond of at it, except myself."

"I call that rather cowardly. It's as if you were afraid of a rival. Now, if I were in your place I should want to show myself daringly confident."

"That might be foolishly confident. The greater the treasure a man carries the more fear he has of being robbed."

"And yet one can't help admiring the man who throws open his doors and says, Come and rob me, if you dare."

"I do admire him—from a distance. Personally I prefer to hide my treasure in my heart and run no risks."

"So that was why you didn't invite Mr. Dunster this afternoon?"

"Not at all. I didn't invite him because I didn't think of it. I will go further and say that I shouldn't have invited him if I *had* thought of it."

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"Really? I imagined that you and he were rather good friends."

"Our work throws us together; but I think Dunster owes me something of a grudge. I really can't find it in my heart to blame him much. I've too great a sympathy with any poor devil who is disappointed."

"Does Mr. Dunster come under that heading? I didn't know it."

"He wanted to do two things, and he hasn't done them. He hasn't done them, but I have. It isn't in human nature, then, not to have some amount of envy."

"Oh yes, it is, Anthony; I'm sure you're wrong. It's not only in human nature in general, but it's in Paul Dunster's nature in particular. I've known him since we were children together and if there's one thing absent from his character it's any kind of littleness. He's dogged and tactless and pugnacious, perhaps. He is so straightforward and high-minded that he has no mercy on any one who isn't. He has neither pity for moral weakness nor tolerance for moral error. I admit all that, but he's not mean."

"Very well, dearest. I'm glad to hear it. But ever since my book has had some success he has—"

"He has—what, Anthony?"

"He has seemed unpleasantly conscious that his had none."

"Ah! his little book on *The Uneducated Public*. It wasn't very pleasant reading, I must say. It was too much like himself—too positive, too downright and perhaps too true. But that's just like Paul. I don't wonder his book failed. What was the other thing he tried to do and couldn't?"

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"Don't you know? You ought to."

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"It's rather hard on him that that, too, has been my great success—my greatest success. You can guess now, can't you?"

"I won't pretend to misunderstand you, Anthony, but again you're wrong. Paul never felt for me anything but—and if he had I'm sure he wouldn't bear you ill-will on that account."

"As I said before, Agatha, I'm glad to hear it. I ask no other proof than what you say."

They reached the middle of the bridge and by the same impulse stopped to look over the broad reaches of the Back Bay, bordered all round its irregular oval by lines of light. They had strolled this way on leaving Westmorland Hall, where Muir, as proctor, had his rooms. He had invited Agatha to tea and had included Mrs. Wollaston and Cousin Abby Leggett to give the necessary air of propriety. It had been a pleasant little festival and Agatha would have enjoyed herself had she been free from anxiety at heart. Every one knows that, for the present, Westmorland Hall is the last cry of undergraduate luxury. It stands in Mount Auburn Street and in its dignity and seclusion is in marked contrast with the little wooden buildings round about. Its exterior reminds the visitor of the Cour des Adieux at Fontainebleau; its entry is like that to the House of Lords; the grand staircase is modelled on that of the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg; the ideas for the marbles come from the Vatican and those for the stained glass from the Cathedral at Bourges. For his apartment the student pays more than he will

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give later for a house; but the generous father has the satisfaction of knowing that, at least, he has given his son a handsome start in life.

"Is this a bit of the Boston Athenæum?" Agatha asked, looking about Muir's sitting-room, "or the boudoir of a prima donna?"

"If one can judge a man by his surroundings," Miss Leggett observed, "I should put you down as half-seer and half-sybarite."

"Which might not be very far wrong," Muir admitted, laughing.

Mrs. Wollaston said nothing, because she thought much. She took note of everything and even glanced surreptitiously into the bedroom. She meant to describe every extravagant detail to her husband on her return; for she knew his opinions on the luxury with which latter-day students were permitted to install themselves. She disapproved of everything from the embroidered bed-spread to the Crown Derby cups; but, like a wise lady, she poured out the tea in silence.

Muir was pleased with the success of his entertainment and, as the ladies were leaving, suggested to Agatha that they should take a walk, while Mrs. Wollaston and Miss Leggett went home. She accepted the proposition the more willingly from the fact that it would give her the occasion she sought of speaking again of the claims of Christopher Love. She had approached the subject once or twice at tea, but he had evaded it. Now, as they stood on the bridge, she shrank from bringing it up again. The October evening was closing in and it was almost dark. Behind Corey Hill the sunset light was only a

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dash of red and orange barred with black. On both sides of the bay the water was spangled with the reflection of the lights above.

"I love this view," Agatha said. "It's so like Venice."

"Yes, it is," Muir agreed, "if one has a great deal of imagination."

"Of course it isn't like Venice, really," Agatha corrected; "but these wide spaces of lagoon with the lights beyond do remind one of the Lido and the Grand Canal."

"All I see," Muir observed, "is Boston's great lost opportunity. I can't be pleased with the beauty there is, because I'm always thinking of the beauty there might have been."

"That," Agatha laughed, "is the supersensitive, hypercritical, fatuously fastidious Harvard determination never to be pleased with anything, nor to perceive a merit where you can pick a flaw. It isn't natural to young men; they begin it in their junior year. It's always a pose with them till it becomes a habit and when it becomes a habit it is a very bad one. I'm surprised that you should have it, Anthony—you, a world-renowned writer and an assistant professor of English."

He, too, laughed, and was secretly flattered at being accused of the traditional Harvard superciliousness. As there was no one in sight he slipped his hand into hers.

"And there's another thing that surprises me," she ventured, boldly, feeling that it was now or never.

"What next?" he asked, good-humoredly.

"It is that a man like you," she went on, trying to

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keep the same tone as heretofore, "should let himself be touched in his honor and make no defence."

He drew his hand hastily away.

"I've been touched in my honor?" he said, sharply.

"I wasn't aware of it."

"That man in Detroit—" she began, nervously.

"It's in the *National* again."

"Pooh! pooh!" he ejaculated, contemptuously.

"Do me the favor of putting that out of your head, as I've put it out of mine."

"But I can't, Anthony. I can't while other people don't."

"Other people? Whom do you mean by other people?"

"I mean Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston, and Cousin Abby—and the public in general, too, for aught I know."

"The public in general," he said, in an irritated tone, "can usually be trusted to mind its own business. As for the Wollastons—"

"They never say anything of you but what is kind, Anthony, dear," she interposed, hurriedly.

"Why should they?"

"But they do think you ought to speak."

"I've no objection to their thinking what they like. Let them hold their opinion and I'll hold mine."

"Forgive me, Anthony," she pleaded, putting her hand rather timidly on his arm. "Of course you know better than I do; but still I can't think that you're doing yourself justice. I feel very strongly about it. You're so grand and noble and superbly independent that you can't realize what a little thing

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like this is to me. When your honor is attacked I feel much worse than if it were my own."

"I wish you wouldn't use the word honor in this connection, Agatha," he said, coldly.

"But it's the only one," she insisted. "I'm not alone in thinking so."

"And I should much prefer," he continued, with a hint of haughtiness in his voice, "that you shouldn't discuss me and my affairs with other people."

"But when it's in the public press, Anthony," she cried, almost with tears, "and a topic of common conversation!"

She was a high-spirited, quick-tempered young woman, who was never slow to resent the slightest suspicion of command or disrespect. But when strong natures bend, they bend low; and it was a proof of the extent to which he had mastered her that she bore herself towards him meekly.

"Then all the more reason why you should show me the consideration of being silent."

"How can I be silent when a subject like this is brought up? Who could be silent?"

"Nobody but you and me, dear," he said, more gently. "For us it is the only course consistent with dignity. As I've already told you, I've made it a rule never to reply to criticism, however unjust—"

"But," she broke in, repeating Miss Leggett's words, that, ever since they were spoken, had burned in her brain like fire—"but, Anthony, love, this isn't a criticism, it is an accusation."

He started nervously, pulling his arm away from her hand.

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"An accusation!" he cried, proudly. "Against me! Who says so?"

"It doesn't need that any one should say so. It's there in print. People have been reading and talking of it for two weeks past and now more than ever. Every one is waiting for you to speak."

"And if I don't?"

"Then, Anthony, this man Love will keep at you till you do. Mr. Wollaston says so."

"Be good enough not to keep quoting the Wollastons at me," he requested, peevishly. "What does Mr. Wollaston know about this business?"

"He doesn't know anything about the business, but he does know something about the man. He says he isn't a person of no consequence. He says he's a man of the highest character and reputation. He says that he's not a man of whose challenge you can afford to take no notice. He says—"

"That will do, dear, if you please. I've the greatest admiration for Professor Wollaston, but I'm not interested to know his opinion on my private affairs."

"Nor mine, either, I suppose," she said, sadly.

"Yours is another matter, dearest. At present you are under his influence, but when you come more fully under mine—"

"I shall still be allowed a mind of my own, I hope," she said, with a rather hopeless attempt to speak jestingly. "You won't deprive me of all privilege, capacity and possibility of private judgment."

"Oh yes, I shall," he answered, in the same spirit, catching eagerly at this change of tone. "When two persons are as united as we shall be, neither will have a mind of his own, for each will have the other's."

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She allowed the conversation to be turned thus into another channel. She felt it was useless to say more, at least for the present. If Anthony would not defend himself, it seemed to her that there was no other course than to get some one else who would do it. Persis Wollaston had already told her that the man who would undertake the task was ready to her hand.

The darkness increased. More lights came out, to be tremblingly reflected on the water. On the esplanade behind Beacon Street the line of gas-lamps ran for miles like a long, straight string of fire. On the Cambridge marshes factories flared with electricity. Far away, towards Charlestown, the radiance of the city pulsating up into the night was white and punctured with innumerable points of light, as if the Milky Way had fallen on the land.

"We ought to be going back now," Agatha said, after a long pause. "Cousin Abby will think I'm late."

They retraced their steps, but they scarcely spoke again. When they parted it was as if with some embarrassment on both sides.

On entering the house Agatha went straight to her carved and gilded desk and wrote:

"DEAR PAUL,—It is more than three weeks since I returned from Lenox and you have not been to see me. Do you call that kind? In saying that I shall be at home to-morrow evening I am offering you a last chance of repentance. Should you not avail yourself of it then, I fear, the door of grace must be closed.

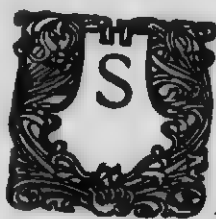
"Yours reproachfully,

"AGATHA ROYAL."

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When she had written this she felt a slight lifting of her depression. She was not quite sure yet that she meant to send it, but it gave her at least the relief of doing something instead of sitting with helpless, folded hands.

IX



SINCE the evening when they had dined together at Mrs. Wollaston's, Muir and Dunster had not met. That they should do so sooner or later was inevitable, but Muir postponed the moment by keeping out of Dunster's way. He did it adroitly, without any appearance of taking flight. Rather than do it otherwise he would not have done it at all. So when, on the morning following his walk with Agatha, he saw Dunster crossing the Yard in his direction he went to meet him. Muir was on his way from Massachusetts Hall to Sever; it would have been easy, therefore, to slip into the library and allow his enemy to pass by. To that small cowardice he would not stoop and, whatever he felt inwardly, he carried himself serenely. When they came abreast he gave Dunster a just perceptible nod and would have continued towards Sever had not Dunster stopped, confronting him.

"Look here, Muir," he said, "I want a word with you."

Muir stood still, looking down at him as a man might look upon a boy.

"I just wanted to say to you," Dunster explained, "that I've had nothing to do with the repeated attacks upon you in the *National*."

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"What the devil is it to me whether you've had or not?" Muir flung at him, contemptuously. He would not have spoken so only that he was exasperated by the half-serious jokes at his expense to which he had just been listening at his club-table. "I never thought of you in one way or another in the matter. You're the sort of bumptious little man who might do anything he liked and no one would ever mind it."

"Then I shall have less compunction in the future," Dunster returned, white to the lips, but forcing himself to speak coolly. "I was beginning to feel something like pity for you. I had half a mind to let you off. I said to myself that there was such a thing as congenital dishonesty, and that if it was your case I shouldn't take the pains to punish you. But since—"

"Why don't you write another book on it and address it to the uneducated public?"

"If I did I shouldn't steal it."

"You might do worse, Dunster. It would be a better book for not being all your own."

"Like yours," Dunster retorted.

"Like mine, if it pleases you to say so. Now," he continued, "will you get out of my way? I'm in a hurry."

As he spoke he laid his hand on Dunster's shoulder and turned him gently from the path. A dozen students passing at the moment saw the act and laughed. Dunster lived through several seconds of almost uncontrollable anger. Only the dread of making a foolish public scandal held him back, so that Muir went unmolested on his way. Then Dunster, too, putting no further mental restraint upon himself, passed on towards Calverley.

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On entering his rooms he found the note that Agatha had written last night and finally decided to send. His first impulse was to refuse the invitation. As long as she remained engaged to Muir he could not resume his friendship with her. He even wrote, excusing himself; but, in the end, desire got the better of discretion and he tore his letter up.

"It's really good of you to come," Agatha said, when he entered her library about nine that evening. She rose from the arm-chair, where she had been reading, and came forward with hand outstretched to meet him. It struck him that in the last few days a change had come over her. She was less a girl and more a woman. She was handsomer and more striking. Her presence made itself more quickly felt. In her soft, white, lacelike dress she had a grace and distinction such as belonged to no other woman he knew. In an instant old feelings he had tried to master cried again within him. Before he had fairly crossed the threshold his resentment towards Anthony Muir was complicated by a sense of jealousy. He had denied to himself that he had been jealous hitherto; now he avowed it boldly and made no further effort to keep the passion down.

"Thank God I can ruin him!" was the thought that shot through his mind. "Then I may get her."

"It was good of you to ask me," he echoed, in response to her words, for his emotions had passed in seconds.

"Yes, it *was* good of me," she returned, as they shook hands. "Any other woman in my place would have been offended because you hadn't come before."

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"But I knew you wouldn't be," he said, as they both sat down.

"On the contrary, I am," she declared. "I'm offended at you and disappointed in you and disillusioned about you. If I hadn't wanted to see you so much I should never have humiliated myself to the point of writing to you."

Dunster looked up with a pleased smile. Agatha thought the cast in his eye more noticeable than it used to be.

"That's the advantage of making one's self rare," he replied. "One becomes sought after, which is so much more flattering than to have people see enough of you."

"But I shouldn't have seen enough of you even if you had come of your own accord."

"Be thankful that I've come now. You wouldn't complain if you knew how much of a compliment it is for me to go to see any one. I've become a terrible bear since last year and ladies have to blandish pretty hard at me to get me out of my den at all."

"Oh, if blandishing is all you want—"

"Yes, yes, I know. You were always good at that. But even smiles begin to lose their effect on me. I shouldn't have come this evening if it hadn't been through fear of dealing you a cruel blow."

"You would certainly have done that. Cousin Abby has gone out to dine with some relatives and Mr. Muir was obliged to attend a meeting, so that I should have been all alone."

"When you're my age you'll find that solitude is the only condition that is really worth while."

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"Thank you, Paul. I really begin to see what a sacrifice you've made for me this evening."

"Don't mention it," he returned, with a deprecating gesture. "I'm always willing to put myself out for a friend. I'd do as much for you any day—provided it isn't too often. By-the-way," he asked, looking up with that glance which made the cast in his eye so visible, "are you always going to call me Paul?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. I just asked the question."

"Aren't you always going to call me Agatha?"

"Not if you're going to be married."

"I *am* going to be married; but I suppose a married woman can have friends."

"No, she can't; she must drop the men she used to know."

"That's ridiculous. It isn't reason."

"But it *is* experience. Marriage has a terribly narrowing effect on life. It shuts the horizon down to one small household and makes all that is outside seem like empty space. How can a married woman keep her friends when she has no longer a place in which to put them?"

"But I know plenty who do keep them."

"Pardon me, you know plenty who think they do, or pretend they do, but they really don't. Friendship implies a mutual sympathy which the very fact of marriage has negated."

"I'm sorry for that," Agatha said, passing gradually from the tone of banter to one of seriousness. "I'm sorry for that, because I thought that, whatever happened, you and I should always go on as we've done hitherto."

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"That's very kind of you, but you know we couldn't."

"If you were to get married I should remain your friend."

"That again would be impossible. You might want to and I might want you to, but there would be my wife. She might be the sweetest creature ever made and yet she'd be an antagonistic principle."

"I don't believe it. I know you'd be my friend if I was married twenty times over—"

"In that case there'd be safety in numbers."

"And I cling to that belief," she went on, still speaking seriously, "because I happen to be in a position where I want a friend."

"You're not married yet, you know; so that what I've said can't be considered to count." To himself he added. "She's found him out. She's turning to me to help her."

"I want some one to help me," she said, as if in answer to his thought. "And I don't know any one to whom I can turn so readily as to you."

"I'm sure you don't," he responded, with blunt sympathy. "Tell me all about it and we'll put it right together."

"I knew you'd say so," she returned, lifting her eyes gratefully towards him, "so I'll come to the point. Do you ever read the *National*?"

"Sometimes."

"Well, in the last number there was a second letter about Anthony."

"I saw it."

"And what did you think about it?"

He was not prepared for this question so he parried.

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"What did you think of it?" he asked.

"To me," she answered, slowly, "it seemed very serious."

"It seemed so to me," he allowed himself to say.

"As I read it," she continued, "it seemed like a grave charge against Anthony's honor. It is as if he had been accused of theft or falsehood."

"Exactly."

"Do other people think so?"

"Every one."

"But Anthony doesn't," she burst out. "That's what worries me. That's what is making me unhappy. Anthony laughs at it and treats it as of no importance at all."

"I'm surprised at that."

"I want him to write to the *National* to deny it."

"That's what he ought to do."

"But he won't. And so, Paul, I thought that you who write so well and are so good a friend would do it for him."

She leaned forward and looked at him beseechingly. Dunster tried to speak, but could find no words. He could only return her gaze stupidly.

"I?" he gasped, when he had regained his power of articulation. "Do you mean that I should take up the cudgels for Muir?"

"He'd do it for you," she said, reproachfully. "There's no one so generous or so ready to help another—unless it's you, Paul."

"But Muir wouldn't let me," he argued, trying to evade a direct refusal. "Muir would resent my interfering in his affairs."

"He needn't know anything about it till it's done."

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You would only have to write to the *National* to say that the charge brought forward by this man Love isn't true. Every one would respect your signature and, as far as Anthony is concerned, I should take all the responsibility on myself."

"But, you see," Dunster urged again, "I'm not supposed to know anything about it."

"You know this accusation isn't true," she said, proudly. "I should think any man was free to speak out on a point like that."

"I may know morally that a thing isn't true and yet not be able to prove it. The negative stand in a case like this doesn't do any good. Muir's duty is to challenge Love to produce his proof. When that's done Muir can explain, but nothing is possible before."

"But couldn't you challenge Love to produce his proof? You've got the book from which he pretends to quote. You said so the other night at dinner."

"You mustn't think me unfriendly, Agatina, if I say no. You'd be putting me in an impossible position. If Muir doesn't speak, no one can speak for him."

"I could," she declared, "if I had the book. Couldn't you lend it to me?"

"No," he answered, bringing out the word with almost brutal emphasis.

"That is, you see a man being shot at and you will neither go to his help yourself, nor let any one else go. It's an attitude that I should hardly have expected in you, Paul."

"Why doesn't he defend himself?"

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"Because he's too proud and independent and indifferent to reply to anything so base."

"That's all very fine, Agatha, but it's too top-lofty to be practical."

"And it's at such a time as this," she went on, "that a man—especially a man like Anthony—should be able to count upon his friends to do for him what is beneath his dignity to do for himself."

Dunster gazed uncomfortably around the room but found nothing to reply.

"I suppose you consider yourself his friend?" she questioned.

"We've never known each other very well," he answered, awkwardly.

"You don't believe in him!" burst from her lips, before she had time to check the words.

He looked at her helplessly. He had none of the small arts of evasion that soften truth. He could only sit and stare.

"You don't believe in him!" she repeated. "And yet I thought you were my friend. I should have trusted to you and leaned on you and looked up to you, and now I see I've been mistaken. I didn't think you capable of littleness—"

"I'm not," he broke in, roughly.

"Then lend me the book."

"No," he roared, "I shall not lend you the book. You couldn't do anything with it if you had it."

"Do you mean that the book proves the accusation against—"

"Look here, Agatha," he interrupted, springing to his feet, "I'm not going to talk about this. I'm going away. You shouldn't have asked me here to-night."

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I'm sorry I came. I might have known something would happen to distress you—"

"Oh no, Paul," she said, with a nervous smile, speaking coldly. She controlled herself and rose in her turn. "I'm not distressed, I'm only undeceived. I had thought of you rather differently, that's all. You've always seemed to me so generous and large-minded and—"

"And now you see I'm not. Well, let it go at that, Agatha. I'm off. Good-night. I sha'n't see you again very likely till—till—till after you and Muir are married."

"So Anthony was right about him," she thought, as she heard him close the street door behind him. "He is jealous and—small."

"What a damned fool I am," Dunster was saying to himself. "I had my chance and I couldn't make use of it. I had only to lend her the book, and she would have seen for herself. But just because she looked at me like that and—and—"

He switched his cane fiercely about him and rushed on through the darkness towards Calverley. "I could have ruined him and I didn't do it. What a damned fool I am!"

By the time he reached his rooms he was calmer. He was not accustomed to go into heroics or indulge himself in excitement. He threw off his overcoat and hat and relieved his feelings by stirring up the fire. It was the first chilly night of the season and the blaze was cheerful. It lit up the room without the assistance of any other light.

"I could have ruined him and I didn't," Dunster said to himself again. "I could have lent her the

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book, and she would have seen for herself. My whole life might have been different If she hadn't looked at me so piteously!"

He walked to the bookcase and, running his finger along a row of bindings, stopped at a volume in dull, old brown. He drew it out and opened it, catching a word here and there in the dancing firelight. The paper was yellow with age though the print was clear and unfaded. Then he dropped into an arm-chair and stretched out his legs towards the blaze. He held the closed volume in his hand, but did not look at it again.

"She thinks that if she had the book she could answer the charge against him."

The thought brought to his lips a faint, contemptuous smile—a smile that remained even when his mind had passed to something else.

For half an hour he sat there motionless. By-and-by his hand stole into the book—into the middle—anywhere. He did not raise his eyes nor look to see what he was doing. With a slow movement he tore out a leaf and tossed it into the fire, then another and another and another, then two or three at a time, then many at a time. He tore slowly, deliberately, thoughtfully. Some of the leaves fell about his chair or at his feet. The book was big and he went on tearing with the same quiet motion.

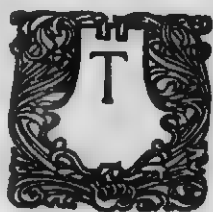
It was a long bit of work, but it was done at last. There was nothing left but the two heavy covers and the fly-leaf on which was written, in an antiquated hand, "Andrew Muir, Edinburgh, 1831." That, too, went on the fire. The covers curled and crackled, the fly-leaf shrivelled away at once. He stooped and

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picked up the pages scattered about the floor. They, too, went on—they, too, disappeared.

Then Dunster sank into his chair again, while the flames flickered over the black, bulbous heap of ashes that had been *A Treatise on the Human Conscience*.

"I could have ruined him," he said to himself for the fiftieth time. "I could have set her free. I could have won her at last, perhaps. I haven't done it. I haven't had the nerve. I'm a fool. I'm a damned, damned fool!"



THE next number of the *National* contained still another letter from Christopher Campbell Love and a further instalment of comparative extracts; but if Mrs. Wollaston's Bee had not met on the day following the appearance of the review the family might not, even then, have been moved to decisive action. Life in Old Cambridge is occupied with principles rather than with personal affairs. Conversation is discreet and temperate, as it should be in a university city where the Puritan spirit lingers still. If you know a bit of news it is a reason for not telling it; if you want to know it you must go at least as far as Boston. An expression of public opinion is, therefore, difficult to get at; it may be doubted whether there would be an uttered public opinion at all if it were not for the Bees. There the Puritan spirit relaxes a little; there the cultivated mind ceases at times to keep vigilant watch upon the tongue; there the confidence, born of long-trying friendship, slips into speech, and there may be even a little gossip—the most delicate, kindly, intellectual gossip—such gossip as John Endicott's wife might have allowed herself in her talks with Margaret Winthrop.

The Bee is a national American institution, but in Old Cambridge, one may be allowed to think, it

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comes to its perfection. As soon as a woman-child is born she is born into a prospective Bee. She is not in swaddling-clothes before her mother begins to think of her "coming-out." "She will come out with the class of such-and-such a year," the lady says to herself, pressing the soft, little bundle of life against her breast, "and she will be in the Bee with So-and-so and So-and-so and So-and-so." She does come out with the class of such-and-such a year, and, sure enough, she joins the Bee with So-and-so and So-and-so and So-and-so. The class—the Harvard class, be it understood—is composed of honest young men and the Bee is full of sweetly pretty girls—mostly with a serious turn of mind—all in their budding-time. There are four bright years of singing and dancing and making merry, and whatever else is done at Harvard, and then the class goes the way of all classes. But the Bee remains. The Bee is an institution. The Bee is a regiment. The Bee has a corporate life. The Bee goes on. Older Bees are marching before, younger Bees are pressing behind. Widowed of its class the Bee sets to work to do the best it can without it. Some of its members marry, some take up special courses of study, some work for their living, some give themselves to philanthropy, some remove to other places, some die; but the Bee goes on. When the ranks are thinned, new aspirants, selected with closer scrutiny than the pearl-merchant bestows upon the most precious Oriental specimen, are voted in. Come what may, the Bee goes on. Never was there a case known in history of a Bee's disbanding or becoming extinct. Those who entered at eighteen watch one another's

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freshness fade, while the hair turns gray and the wrinkles come. Still they lunch and sup and sew together week after week and year after year, finding support in the mere fact of life-long comradeship and things worked for, talked of, and laughed at in common.

Mrs. Wollaston had gone through all the regulation processes. She had come out with the class of 1859, and she had joined the Bee with those who were eighteen or thereabouts that year. There had been over twenty of them, of whom ten or twelve remained. Of these ten or twelve the majority were assembled at Mrs. Pinckney's (it was her turn to have the Bee) on the day following the appearance of the third letter on Anthony Muir in the pages of the *National*.

Every one knows the "Pinckney house" in Divinity Avenue, if for no other reason than because of the fact that it lies so conveniently near the college grounds as to be a veritable Naboth's vineyard to the authorities. It is an open secret that the law school would have begged, borrowed, or stolen it long ago, were it not for the circumstance that those who have the interests of Harvard at heart are praying that "Old Pinckney" may leave it to the university in his will. It is one of those square, spacious, pyramid-roofed mansions, once so numerous in Old Cambridge, but now gradually disappearing to give place to huge, red-brick college halls.

The ladies, who had lunched in the fine old dining-room, were at work in a large, comfortably furnished parlor. The room was flooded with sunshine, the last dahlias were still in bloom in the garden, and round the windows the ampelopsis crept in tendrils of crim-

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son and orange that rivalled the autumn flowers. Under the manipulation of experienced fingers strips of flannel and cotton cloth took forms remotely resembling those of human limbs. Conversation, discreetly languid at first, grew more animated as the afternoon passed on.

"Isn't that enough of one size for this time?" asked Mrs. Henty, whose husband was dean of the School of Scientific Warfare. She was a pretty little woman with flaxen hair and china-blue eyes. Nature had meant her for a flirt of the harmless domestic variety, but circumstances had been against her. As the daughter of a professor of Greek and the sister of one of Geology and the wife of a dean of a School of Warfare her aptitudes had never been allowed play. She was like a primrose that has been called upon to become an edelweiss. The cold, classic heights of learning had not been suited to her, and she was passing into middle age with a gracefully vacuous air of having missed her vocation. "Isn't that enough of one size for this time?" she repeated, pointing to a pile of incipient shirts.

"Enough for this time and for all time, for all time and for all eternity."

This unexpected reply came from Mrs. Bootle, the handsome, haggard, hawk-eyed wife of the Professor of Oriental Psychology. Mrs. Bootle had not been a charter-member of the Bee, she had been "voted in." Her husband was a comparatively late comer to Cambridge. He was from the West, and was not a Harvard man at all. She herself had been accepted by the Bee, perhaps rather hastily, on the ground that by birth she was a Biddle; but there was a tacit

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feeling now that she was the one mistake the Bee had ever made. It was not that there was anything against Mrs. Bootle; it was only, as Miss Wimble put it, "that her personality was emphatic" and that she lacked the restraint of speech indigenous to Old Cambridge.

"I should think," Mrs. Bootle went on, in response to the half-smiling, half-startled looks around her, "that in the years that this Bee has been at work it had made garments enough to cover every human body ever born. It often occurs to me that our philanthropic energy, by creating a demand for orphans, creates also the supply."

"You mean," said Mrs. Arlington Revere, "that if smaller provision were made for orphans there would be less temptation for people to leave them behind them when they die."

Mrs. Arlington Revere was the one avowedly worldly member of the Bee. She was rich and a widow, and the fact that she had no children of her own enabled her to patronize promising young men. Her beauty had been of the large, fair, dimpling sort that lasts late into life, and even now, at sixty, more than its traces remained. Old Pinckney admired her, and had called her the Duchesse in "*Le monde où l'on s'ennuie*." Everybody laughed at this, though Old Pinckney himself was the only one who saw the double edge to his saying.

"But they can't help it," said Mrs. Wollaston, as she lilted about from one group to another, flourishing a baby's garment in her hand. "I don't suppose any one leaves orphans on purpose."

"It really may be questioned," said Miss Dor-

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chester, looking up from her work through eye-glasses from which a long, black ribbon hung—"it may be questioned whether less philanthropy wouldn't make the unthrifty classes thriftier."

She was a sweet woman, descended from a long line of Puritan ministers. Her face had that wistful, æsthetic, refined expression often transmitted from an ancestry whose ideals have been high and narrow. "Aspiration without wings," Old Pinckney had nicknamed her, and, with the discretion that belongs to a community in which no one would say an unkind thing, the epithet was handed on.

"Less philanthropy might make the unthrifty classes thriftier, but it would certainly leave naked children nakeder."

This was the opinion of Mrs. Pinckney, a little, round, cushion-like lady, who was as good as she looked. In a land where thoughtful minds are trying to elevate charity to the rank of a science, Mrs. Pinckney was frankly reactionary. Her first impulse with regard to the poor was to put money in their pockets and clothes on their backs. She was never happier than when filling the larder for the wife and children of some drunken wretch who ought to have done it himself. It was very unwise on her part and brought her into constant collision with Miss Dorchester, who held office in the Associated Charities.

"Sympathy and counsel may be all very well," Mrs. Pinckney admitted, "but my first concern is to see that these poor waifs at Avonhill have something to keep their legs warm."

"If their parents had only been taught foresight—" Miss Dorchester began, in a lady-like tone of argument.

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"There I agree with you," laughed Mrs. Arlington Revere. "I believe you ought to do everything for the poor but help them."

"You'll never make me think that," Mrs. Pinckney declared. "Help them first and teach them foresight afterwards seems to me the best gospel."

"Still," said Mrs. Bootle, returning to the charge, "I should think that by this time the wealth of Avonhill, like that of the Oriental sheik, would largely consist in garments. There must certainly be ten changes of raiment for every child—"

"Children are so destructive," smiled Miss Bunning, the president of the Mothers' Conference. No one could look at Miss Bunning without seeing that she was the New England spinster by irresistible calling. She had the clear, rarefied, virginal aspect of starlight upon snow. She had meant to dedicate her life to the care of a widowed father, only he had frustrated her plans by marrying again. Since then she had devoted herself to children in the abstract. She edited a monthly publication called *Child Culture* and was a strong advocate of the theory that babies should not be allowed to wear clothing until after the age of two.

"I'm the mother of six," Mrs. Bootle said, in reply to Miss Bunning. "No one knows better than I how destructive they are. Perhaps, after all, it's nothing but maternal jealousy that makes me sigh to see so much beautiful attire going to Avonhill, when my boys have scarcely one shirt to wear while the other is in the wash."

A smile went round. No one was actually shocked and yet it was felt that no one but Mrs. Bootle would have expressed just that idea in just that way.

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"How strange for a Biddle to talk like that," Miss Dorchester whispered to Mrs. Wollaston.

"It is a little blunt," Mrs. Wollaston admitted, "but I don't suppose she means any harm."

"We're as poor as church mice," Mrs. Bootle began again.

"Scholarship is rarely lucrative," interposed Miss Wimble, the sister of the well-known writer on botanical subjects. "Great research often yields very small results." Miss Wimble had herself produced a work on *The Extinct Wild Flowers of New England*, and so was qualified to judge.

"Harvard," said Mrs. Bootle, keeping close to the subject on her mind, "is like an army equipped with the smartest uniforms and the quickest firing guns, but without a commissariat. She can't find space on earth for the hideous buildings she is rich enough to put up, while she lets her professors starve."

"Oh, they don't really starve," Mrs. Wollaston cried, waving the baby's garment with a gesture of protestation. "The very poorest of them have something to eat."

"And it's the way people leave their money," Miss Wimble explained. "I've heard my brother say that it isn't the president's fault if the professors are not well paid. He wouldn't mind if they were all wealthy. But people have such an inconsiderate zeal for building halls that will carry their names down to posterity. It is a form of posthumous celebrity with which I have little sympathy."

"And I none at all," Mrs. Bootle declared. "It's time that some of the wealthy testators you speak about were thinking less of the machinery of educa-

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tion and more of the men who make the wheels go round. If it wasn't for my husband's books we couldn't live."

"Speaking of books," said Mrs. Arlington Revere, smiling sweetly towards Mrs. Bootle, "I wonder if any one has read the last *National*?"

Every one had read it, and every one, except Mrs. Wollaston, avowed the fact. That astute little lady bent her head over her sewing and held her peace. She judged wisely that if she listened and said nothing her connection with Anthony Muir and Agatha Royal might be overlooked. In this way she might learn something of the trend of public sentiment to carry back to Mr. Wollaston.

There was at first a pause of hesitation. The mention of the *National* brought the same subject to everybody's mind and yet no one liked to start it. It was Miss Bunning who found the way to lead delicately up to it.

"I thought Dean Henty's article excellent," she said, turning to the wife of that distinguished man. "His views regarding the effect of scientific warfare on modern motherhood exactly coincide with mine. And then his style is so perfect. A prose Browning I call him. One really has to read everything he writes two or three times before one knows what he means, and one isn't quite sure then."

"I must tell him you said so," Mrs. Henty replied, smiling. "I know he'll be pleased."

Then Miss Wimble took a step nearer the objective point of the conversation.

"I didn't at all agree with Professor Mauser's article as to the effect of the Martinique eruptions on

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West Indian vegetation. I thought I had sufficiently dealt with that theory in my preface to *The Extinct Wild Flowers of New England*."

"That was an admirable letter from Professor Riggs," said Miss Blight, "on the unusually early appearance of the silver-crested red-start. He isn't right, however, when he speaks of the similarity of his notes with those of the robber-thrush. The two are quite different to an attentive ear."

Miss Blight, a shy, stout lady, was an authority on birds. She knew every one from every other and had reduced their songs to music. It was not often that Miss Blight spoke at meetings of the Bee, but when she said anything at all it was to real purpose. This was the case now, when she mentioned letters; for on the subject round which other ladies only circled Mrs. Bootle pounced with the precision of a bird of prey.

"And I," she said, going directly to the mark, "have never read anything in my life so foolish as the letters about that poor young Muir."

There was a perceptible movement in the company. The matter was in hand at last. Each lady grasped her sewing in workman-like fashion and made herself comfortable in her seat. Mrs. Wollaston bent herself over her task and affected not to hear.

"Why do you say foolish?" Mrs. Arlington Revere asked, in innocent determination to keep the subject up.

"Well, isn't it foolish?" Mrs. Bootle questioned in return. "Somebody says he copied his book from somebody else. What does it matter if he did? If my husband wrote all his books out of his own head we should have been in the almshouse long ago."

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"You do him injustice, I'm sure," Miss Wimble protested. "Every line he writes is so convincing. His last work—the one on Assyrian ethics—touched me profoundly."

"I told him most of what to say in that," Mrs. Bootle declared, audaciously. "I got a good deal of it out of *The Ladies' Home Journal*."

"What has given New England literature its value hitherto," said Miss Dorchester, looking up again from her sewing and speaking in a precise, didactic tone, "has been its sincerity. Emerson wasn't always elegant, Hawthorne wasn't always broad, Longfellow wasn't always strong; but all of them were always true. There have been greater groups of writers in the history of the world, but never one more eager to give out only what belonged to itself and what it was convinced of."

"I don't care anything about that," Mrs. Bootle declared, with an air of large-minded superiority to the trivial. "They're all dead, while this poor young Muir is living; and he's very good-looking, too."

"But isn't it for us New England women," Miss Dorchester continued, with a sweet, patient smile towards Mrs. Bootle, "to be very jealous of any depreciation in the moral tone of what our authors give to the world? Don't you think so, Isabel?" she asked, turning to include Miss Bunning, of whose sympathy she was sure.

"I've the greatest liking for Mr. Muir," Miss Bunning admitted. "You may remember that I quoted with approval in the July number of *Child Culture* some remarks on the child's conscience taken from his book. They struck me at the time as being sug-

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gested by Professor Royce, but I didn't go into the point further. I've no doubt that he'll be able to prove his innocence of the charge against him, but until he does one must naturally hold one's judgment in suspense."

"Like the guillotine," suggested Mrs. Arlington Revere, flashing her bright smile around the company. "That, too, was held in suspense until it came down and chopped somebody's head off."

"My brother," said Miss Wimble, "has made a calculation on the chances of any one's expressing precisely the same series of thoughts in precisely the same terms as some one else. He says that given the number of words in the English language and the number of ideas in the human mind, Mr. Muir's chance would be about one in five hundred trillions, four hundred billions, three hundred millions, and—and—I forget the smaller numbers."

"There would be that chance at least," Mrs. Pinckney said, charitably. "Who knows but what the poor young man may have stumbled on it?"

"It would be hardly likely, would it?" Miss Bunning said, in just the slightest tone of incredulity.

"It's hardly likely that you'll get the prize in a lottery when you take a ticket for it," Mrs. Pinckney returned, "and yet some person does get it."

"Sally Pinckney, don't you say another word," Mrs. Arlington Revere cried, holding up a warning finger. "You're so good-hearted that you take up all the most desperate cases. When you begin to plead a man's cause it must already be as good as lost."

"But none of us would say that of Mr. Muir's,"

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Miss Dorchester protested; "we only ask him to prove himself not guilty. His case attracts all the more attention from his book having been so warmly welcomed by the public."

"And for that reason it is all the more sad," Miss Bunning said, sententiously.

A few minutes passed in silence. It seemed as if the subject had been exhausted, when Miss Blight came to the rescue and gave it another turn.

"I wonder how Agatha Royal feels about it?" she hazarded, looking around her with shy watchfulness, as if she were listening to a bird-call.

"I suppose she's like the rest of us," Miss Dorchester sighed. "She probably doesn't know yet how she feels."

"It's a fortunate thing for her," said Mrs. Arlington Revere, "that it has all come out before marriage and not afterwards."

"That's very true," Miss Bunning agreed. "I've had a feeling from the first that that wedding wouldn't take place."

"He'd have to go away, I suppose," Miss Dorchester surmised.

"Certainly," Miss Bunning replied, in a tone of authority. "The Faculty would require that, at the very least."

"I know people," said Mrs. Henty, "who've already withdrawn the invitations to a dinner they were going to give for him and Agatha."

"On what grounds?" Mrs. Bootle demanded, with an air of hawk-eyed indignation.

"They *said*," replied Mrs. Henty, with a strong emphasis on the second word—"they *said* it was owing to an aunt's death."

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"And hadn't she died?" Mrs. Bootle demanded again.

"Well, yes," Mrs. Flenty acknowledged. "As a matter of fact she had died, but they weren't going to say so until after the dinner was over. But when this trouble about Mr. Muir arose they were so embarrassed that they were obliged to bring their aunt forward."

"And now," said Miss Wimble, "I suppose she'll break her engagement."

"Would you?" asked Mrs. Bootle, turning on her fiercely. "Would you break your engagement for a little thing like that?"

"If I were engaged," Miss Wimble answered, with natural hesitation, "and I discovered that he wasn't worthy of me, I should feel it right to withdraw."

"After all, we don't know that Agatha has found that out as yet," Mrs. Arlington Revere suggested, peaceably.

"Oh no," Miss Wimble agreed, promptly. "Please don't think that I even hint at such a thing. I'm only supposing—only *supposing*, mind you—that she knows the worst. My brother's calculation seems to give Professor Love so many chances of being in the right."

"I'm supposing that she knows the worst," Mrs. Wollaston repeated to herself. "That's Louisa Wimble's stand-point and, more or less consciously, it is that of everybody here. Poor Mr. Muir! Opinion has already gone against him. I don't believe I need wait to hear any more."

She lifted her head and began to fold her work.

"I think I'll finish this at home, Sally," she said, aloud, to Mrs. Pinckney.


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There was a slightly startled movement and a general recollection that between the Royal and Wollaston families the ties were strong. Each lady examined her conscience rapidly to see whether she had said anything at which Mrs. Wollaston could take offence, but acquitted herself of having spoken indiscreetly or without charity.

"After all, he may be innocent," Miss Bunning said to Miss Wimble as they were going home.

"Very true," that lady assented, warmly, "even though everything so far tells against him."

XI

ELL, I don't see that they said much," Mr. Wollaston remarked, when his wife had given him an account of the conversation at the Bee.

He sat in the gloaming, toasting his feet before his study fire. Mrs. Wollaston kept in the shadow, away from the blaze. She still wore her bonnet and gloves, as when she came in, but her cloak was thrown off, over the back of the chair.

"It wasn't what they said, Hector, but what they meant that was important," she returned, with quiet determination in her tone.

"They meant what they said, I suppose."

"Oh, they meant a great deal more than that. You wouldn't expect any of them to say all she thought."

"They wouldn't be much like other women if they didn't say a good deal more."

"There you're wrong, dear. There is where you judge women by what you see in men. A woman weighs her words when a man doesn't think anything about it; and at our Bee—"

"Oh, I know, I know. At your Bee the weighing of words is a fine art. It's a bit of feminine Puritanism that hasn't escaped my attention. The typical Old Cambridge woman will measure her words so as

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to convey the greatest amount of meaning with the least possible responsibility for having made a statement."

"There's some truth in that, dear; and for that very reason it was easy to see that, in every one's opinion, Mr. Muir is in a most painful position."

"Pooh!" he ejaculated, slipping down in his big, leathern chair and throwing one leg over the other. He had a manly dislike to taking the tone of public opinion from a Bee. He had been driven at times almost to disavow his own beliefs, because Miss Wimble or Miss Bunning had declared publicly their willingness to endorse them. "Pooh!" he said again. "It will be time enough to think of that when we hear that some one in the college is giving it serious attention."

"There wasn't a woman present, Hector, who hadn't some close connection with the Faculty—" she began, earnestly.

"Thank Heaven, there's no petticoat government there," he interposed.

"No, dear; but even professors—even *presidents*—can't help hearing the opinions of their wives and sisters; and so, when it comes to meetings of the Faculty—"

"It goes in one ear and out the other," he grunted.

"You mustn't judge them all by yourself, Hector," she said, humbly. "There are very few of them who have your clearness and independence of mind. Naturally I think as you think; but I know some families, even in the college, where it isn't so. You'll think me boastful, perhaps, but it has happened more than once that things which were thought out first in

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meetings of our Bee have been enacted afterwards by the Faculty."

"Tut, tut, my good woman. That's nothing but the old superstition that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. It doesn't do anything of the kind; and even if it did, it shouldn't get a finger in the pie of Harvard. There isn't a man who enters the college grounds that doesn't leave the very recollection that he has a wife outside."

"That may be, dear," she persisted. "But still it is evident that Mr. Muir is being talked about. The Ripley Brownes have even withdrawn the invitations to a dinner they were giving for him and Agatha. Mrs. Henty told us so. She didn't give the name—"

"That's like your Bee."

"But she said it was people who had just lost an aunt. The Ripley Brownes have lost one, and as they said to Agatha the day she met them here, 'We're trying to have you and Mr. Muir to dinner,' I concluded that it must be they. Now, if the Ripley Brownes have taken the matter up, then, Hector, dear, don't you think that we—?"

Mrs. Wollaston dwelt on the last word, and allowed her sentence to die away into a significant inflection.

"That we—what?" he asked, with a jerk of the eyes back in her direction.

"Well, you see," she argued, "we're not doing anything."

"What is there for us to do, my dear? We haven't sent them an invitation to dinner, so we can't rival the Ripley Brownes in withdrawing it. I don't see what there is left for us."

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"With our responsibility towards Agatha—" she began, tremulously.

"God bless my soul!" he cried, sitting suddenly upright, "that girl will kill me. I have no responsibility towards her any more than I have towards Pocahontas. I washed my hands of her when she came of age."

"Still, Hector, dear, you wouldn't want her to marry—"

"Wouldn't want her to marry! She can marry a Mormon, for anything I care; she can marry a Turk and go into a harem. The more she marries the better I shall be pleased."

"You'd at least want her to be happy."

"I've no objection to that—none whatever. She might be as happy as an angel and I shouldn't interfere. What I protest against is the theory that because she was my ward before she was of age I must father her and mother her into her second childhood."

"I don't know any one," she went on, in her half-timid, half-determined way, "who would reproach himself more if Agatha's marriage didn't turn out to be a fortunate one."

"Now, my dear, good wife," he cried, wheeling his chair round so as to face her as she sat in the shadow, "why should I reproach myself? I shouldn't do it if our own marriage had turned out to be an unfortunate one. Why should I begin, then, for two young people whose destinies are entirely in their own hands?"

"You've got too good a heart, Hector, not to do it."

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"My heart is like a stone—like a stone, Fanny, do you hear? It's no use trying to work upon my feelings. I'm as indifferent to antecedent anxiety as I should be incapable of retrospective remorse."

"And so if the Ripley Brownes think it time to act," Mrs. Wollaston continued, taking up again the argumentative thread she had dropped, "all the more, it seems to me, should we."

He threw himself back into his chair again.

"Will you be good enough to tell me," he asked, in a wearied tone, "what you mean by act?"

"I mean to do something—to take some step to make our situation clearer."

"Our situation! What situation?"

"Agatha's situation, if you like it better, Hector, dear. I speak as if hers was our own."

"I don't feel as if hers was mine. I'm not engaged to Anthony Muir, whatever you may be."

"I can't help feeling that we're losing time. It's a month now since these charges were made against him, and we've done nothing whatever to inquire into them or to satisfy ourselves whether there is any truth in them or not."

"My dear, I'm neither a grand jury nor a coroner's inquest. I don't feel it my duty—"

"It isn't to be supposed that Agatha can do it for herself, dear."

"As far as I can see, Christopher Campbell Love is doing it for her. She has only to sit still and it will be made as plain to her as daylight."

"And in the mean time she may have married him."

"I can't stop her doing that."

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"Yes, you can, dear. It's perfectly simple. You could go to Paul Dunster and ask him to lend you his copy of the original book from which Mr. Muir is said to have—borrowed so extensively."

He sat up again.

"How did you come to think of that?" he asked, with the air of being face to face with a wonder.

"Just in the ordinary way, Hector. I've thought of it all along. Mr. Dunster said he had the book. It seems a natural thing to ask him to let us see it."

"So it does; so it does," he agreed. "I'd have thought of it myself, of course, if—if—if the idea had come to me."

"Of course you would, Hector," she echoed. "It may have been something you said that suggested it to me."

"Probably it was. In any case I'll ask Paul Dunster for the book the next time I see him."

"I wouldn't wait till then, dear," she counselled, rising and throwing her cloak over her arm, preparatory to going up-stairs.

"There's no hurry," he returned, as she left the room; but she knew by the attitude he took, slipping down again in his chair before the fire, that he was pondering.

When she saw him putting on his overcoat after dinner she checked herself just as she was on the point of asking where he meant to go at so late an hour.

"Better let him do it in his own way," she reflected, like an experienced wife. "He has thought it over, and is going to Paul Dunster's."

This was true; for twenty minutes later the pro-

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fessor was seated before the fire in Dunster's sitting-room in Calverley.

"You're snug here, Dunster, eh?" he remarked, looking about him. "Books, pictures, plaster-casts, and fancy-work. I suppose that's the modern instructor's idea of what his surroundings ought to be. We did with less in my time."

"I fancy it's a different standard of taste—" Dunster began, apologetically, taking a small chair and placing himself on the other side of the fireplace. He was beating his brains to find out why the old man had come.

"That's it," Mr. Wollaston broke in—"it's a different standard of taste. When I was young the men had taste in books and the women had taste in crochet-work. Now it's the other way round. The men are connoisseurs in artistic needle-work and the women are taking to the books. What's that thing hanging up there on the wall? Is it a bit of Beauvais tapestry or a patch-work quilt?"

"It's an old embroidered chasuble," Dunster laughed, a little shamefacedly. "I picked it up at the Campo dei Fiori in Rome."

"Hmph!" he snorted. "What's that thing on the mantel-place? Something between a beer-mug and a bas-relief?"

"That's a bit of Capo di Monte. I got it cheap in Naples, because it's cracked."

"Hmph! What's in there?" he asked, pointing to a half-open door.

"That's my bedroom, sir."

"And in there?"

"My bath-room."

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"Hmph! We did without that in my time. I must say you coddle yourselves a good deal. I don't believe in it. Halls like Calverley do as much harm to Harvard as the Golden House of Nero did to Rome."

"Oh, Calverley is nothing to Westmorland," Dunster laughed again. "You should go in there some day, sir—"

"That's Muir's hall, isn't it?"

"Yes; and he's fitted up as if he were Madame de Pompadour."

"So my wife says. And that reminds me, Dunster, of what I've come for. Didn't you say at my house one day not long ago that you had a copy of this Christopher Love book, about which the *National* is making such a fuss?"

"Did I, sir?" Dunster asked, trying to summon up an expression of surprise.

"Well, didn't you?"

"If you say I did, professor, I must have done so."

"Then I do say so. And I want you to lend it to me."

"But I haven't got one."

"You haven't got—?" the professor began, slowly.

"No, sir," Dunster answered, promptly.

"You mean you've lent it?"

"No, I haven't lent it."

"Then you've given it away?"

"No, sir. I don't really possess the book at all."

"Did you ever possess it?"

"Yes, I used to see it among my books. But somehow it has disappeared."

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"Stolen? Do you think Muir could have—"

"Oh no; not that. Muir wouldn't do that. Oh no, no, Muir mustn't be suspected—"

"Then somebody else may have walked off with it."

"No, not that either—or rather, perhaps so," Dunster said, confusedly. "Yes, I imagine some one must have picked it up and carried it home."

"That ought to be looked into. We can't have book-thieves about."

"Oh, I don't suppose, after all, that anybody did carry it off. It's just—it's just—"

"Disappeared," the professor suggested.

"Yes; exactly. It disappeared," Dunster agreed, nervously.

"Went off on its own legs, so to speak," the old man continued, dryly.

Dunster tried to laugh.

"Went up the chimney, I dare say," Mr. Wollaston pursued.

"Oh, sir," Dunster protested, "why do you say that?"

"Why do I say that, Dunster? Just because I think you're the sort of chivalrous young idiot who would make away with a compromising document rather than have it lying around as a witness against some one else."

"You do me injustice, sir," Dunster cried.

"Not a bit of it. I don't do you injustice enough. In my time young fellows had energy even if they had no embroidered chasubles hanging on their walls. They could do without a bath-room at the head of everybody's bed, but they didn't let slip the chance to press their own advantage."

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"I don't follow you, sir," Dunster said, a little stiffly.

"They were of the opinion that all's fair in love and war—"

"But it isn't," Dunster broke in.

"Now, that's just what I'd expect you to say. You're one of those supersensitively honorable chaps who would never want to carry a point over a rival if he thought the contest unequal."

"If you intend that as a compliment, sir—" Dunster began, eagerly.

"Oh no, I don't. I was going on to say that it's my belief that you threw Christopher Love's book into the fire just so that Anthony Muir might have another chance. I'd expect it of you, Dunster. I've seen signs of weakness in you before now. It's just such a foolish bit of self-sacrifice as your Puritan blood would prompt you to. The whole history of New England is full of such types as you—men who show mercy on every one but themselves. It's a great mistake, Dunster. I'm not surprised at you, but it's a great mistake."

"I'm not doing it," Dunster cried, passionately.

"What! Don't tell me! Do you mean to say that Christopher Love's book didn't—"

He ended his sentence with a gesture of throwing something into the fire.

"I don't admit it, sir," Dunster replied, with a red flush in his face.

"But you don't deny it. Ah, Dunster, you shouldn't let friendship carry you to such extremes. It's all very well to be lenient, but not to kick a man when he's down, or when, at least, he's about to fall,

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is an opportunity wasted. It 'll tell against you in the end. Just because Anthony Muir has been your friend—"

"Great Heavens, sir! I loathe the man," Dunster cried, springing to his feet. "Excuse me," he added, recovering himself and sitting down again. "I didn't mean to say that. It slipped out against my will. I don't like Muir. I can't conceal that from you now. I never did like him much. He isn't my sort. He's too polished and plausible—"

"And good-mannered," the professor put in, slyly. "I hate a good-mannered man, myself. Good manners and bad morals, I always say, go together. Thank the Lord, we don't have either of them in Harvard. So, just because you don't like Muir, you made away with a book that might be proof against him. Well, Dunster, it's worse than I thought."

"I didn't do it for that reason," Dunster said, unguardedly.

"Oh, I thought you hadn't done it at all. But it's often that way. Weakness leads to prevarication. Perhaps you might as well tell me the worst, now, Dunster. It's just as easy to make a clean breast of it while you're about it."

"I've got nothing to reproach myself with, sir," Dunster said, in a clear, hard voice.

"Well, that would depend on the state of a man's conscience. Some people have a more delicate sense of right and wrong than others. The main fact, however, is that you did make away with Christopher Love's book. That you don't deny any longer."

"No, I don't deny it. I made away with it. It

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may have been my public duty to hold Muir up to justice, but—"

"But you thought it wasn't your duty to turn hangman as long as there's a hangman appointed by the law."

"No, I didn't think that at all. I should have been glad to expose Muir, as I could have exposed him if I had kept the book. I hate him. It would be a satisfaction to me to see him hissed out of Harvard, as he deserves to be. I burned the book because—because—"

Dunster's lip trembled. His eyes, with their curious, astigmatized glance, were feverishly bright.

"I burned the book," he began again, "because—because—Miss Royal—"

"Ah, another foolish reason."

"Because Miss Royal loves him," Dunster finished, at last, "and I wouldn't strike at him when it meant wounding her."

The professor grunted, scratched his head, thrust out his under-lip, and shifted in his seat.

"I'm trying to think," he said, after a pause, "in which of the older literatures there's a case like that. Dear, dear! Twenty years ago I should have had it at my tongue's-end. My memory's going. There's no doubt about it. Let me see, now. I think it's the old Spanish ballad of *Doña Pilar*. *Doña Pilar* was a lady with two lovers. Their names were Don Diego and Don Felipe. The one was a blustering criminal, the other a noble gentleman. Of course, being a woman, she loved the brute. Then, for her sake, Don Felipe saved the bandit from the gallows and consecrated his life to the service of them both.

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There's a Scotch version of the story under the name of *The Laird of Blair-in-Gowrie*. You'd be likely to find it in dear old Child's collection. You ought to look it up, Dunster."

"For what purpose, sir?" Dunster asked, bridling somewhat.

"For the moral."

"And may I ask what that is?"

"Only this: that a woman who loves one man will accept the sacrifice of another man who loves her, and take it as a matter of course. I don't suppose the Greek army thought Agamemnon was doing anything more than his duty when he offered up Iphigenia. Just so a woman finds it easy that the man who loves her should mount the altar, if it serves the turn of the man she loves."

"Some women might. I don't believe all women would."

"When you say some women, Dunster, you say all. I know them through and through and there isn't a pinch of difference between them. Now, if you imagine she's going to think more highly of you for what you've done—"

"But I don't, sir."

"Well, that's foolish, too; but I suppose it's just as well. She won't do it, and by not expecting it you'll escape being disappointed. I've no patience with the altruistic romance of such young men as you. It's archaic; it's even worse, for it's anachronistic; it's unpractical and preposterous and ought to be made illegal. Well," he continued, rising, and standing for a minute with his back to the fire, "I'd better be off home. I ought to have stayed there, for then I

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shouldn't have known that one of our rising young men had betrayed so little common-sense as to have burned a document that might have ousted the man who's just ahead of him. If Muir had gone you would have got his place and been made assistant professor. That's another thing for you to reflect on. Where's my overcoat?"

When he was ready to go he looked round the room again.

"That's the bath-room?" the old man said, pointing with his stick towards the door.

"Yes, sir."

"Let me look at it."

He crossed the room and pushed the door open.

"My word of honor!" he cried, as he stood on the threshold and glanced in. "Blue tiles, a porcelain tub, a shower-bath, three kinds of soap, eau-de-cologne, clean towels enough for an army, and an embroidered bag for your slippers! It's shameful, Dunster. The Faculty ought really to put a stop to this enervating luxury. No wonder the tone of Harvard is going down."

"But perhaps cleanliness is going up," Dunster suggested.

"In my time we could keep clean without so much machinery. But I'll be off—I'll be off."

He shuffled towards the door of the apartment. Dunster hurried before him and held it open.

"When I was an instructor," the old man said, before he passed out, "if a professor of years and standing paid me the attention—showed me the honor, I might say—of making me a visit in the dead hour of the night, it was my custom to speak up before he left

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and ask if I might be permitted to escort him homeward. Those good old times went out when chasubles and bath-tubs came in."

"Oh, but, professor, do let me!" Dunster cried, coloring, but smiling.

"No, Dunster, no. It's too late for you to be out-of-doors. I wouldn't expose you to the weather. You'll want to be getting your slippers out of the embroidered bag."

"I should have offered, only that I didn't dare. I was afraid my company might be forced upon you."

"I could have judged of that. If I hadn't wanted you I shouldn't have let you come. But there, there. Good-night. Get away from the door or the air will blow on you. Go back and sit with your Capo di Monte beer-mug. Good-night, good-night."

He shook Dunster's hand, closed the door, and began stumbling down the stairs.

"No, no, professor," Dunster cried, rushing out, his hat in his hand and his overcoat across his arm, "don't walk down. Let me ring for the lift. Nobody ever walks up or down stairs in Calverley."

"Now may the Lord have mercy on us!" Mr. Wolleston exclaimed. "They've become too luxurious for natural locomotion and must be raised and lowered as if they had no use of their limbs. Well, I submit," he grumbled, as he allowed Dunster to guide him to the lift.

When they were in the street he took the young man's arm.

"So the long and the short of it is," he said, resuming the earlier theme of their conversation, "that

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you know Anthony Muir to be guilty of the charges made against him."

"I do; but I don't want to be a witness for the prosecution."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because I waited, sir, for Muir to tell you himself. I shouldn't have let it out to-night if you hadn't forced me."

"Now," the professor asked, in the tone, unusual with him, of one seeking advice—"now what would you do if you were in my place?"

"You can't do anything, sir. No one can do anything without the original book. And, as far as I am aware, the only copy of that is in Detroit, unless, as is probable, Muir has one himself."

"So that Muir is safe."

"As far as we here in Harvard can do anything, he is."

"And do you think—of course I'm only speculating, mind you—but do you think it would be a good plan to let him stay safe?"

"You mean, to let him off? That's something every man must judge for himself, sir."

"But you? How do you feel about it, Dunster? Dunster stopped in his walk.

"Mr. Wollaston," he said, "I hate the fellow. You know that already. But I tell you frankly that I feel like a reprieved prisoner ever since that cursed book went up in smoke and I haven't got the responsibility of breaking another man's career."

"That's weak, very weak, Dunster," he said, severely. "You ought to be more public-spirited. You wouldn't be upheld by a court of honor, and if

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the Faculty knew what you had done I don't know what they'd say."

But none the less he let his fingers slip down Dunster's coat-sleeve and pressed the young man's hand.

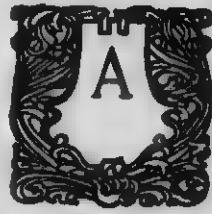
"It's a pity he isn't taller," Mrs. Wollaston said to her husband, a little later, "and that he has that cast in his eye."

She had heard only a partial recital of the evening's conversation. The professor thought it enough that she should know that Dunster no longer possessed the incriminating volume. How it had disappeared he kept to himself.

"I don't see why it should have happened so," Mrs. Wollaston went on, in mild complaint against fate. "None of the other Dunsters have casts in their eyes, and Frank and Maurice are tall enough. Just an inch or two would have made all the difference in the world to Agatha, and the match would have been so suitable."

"On such slight, trivial, worthless considerations do women's affections hang," the professor remarked, scornfully, and shuffled off to bed.

XII



ANTHONY MUIR threw himself half-dressed into his big reading-chair. He had risen late after a restless night. That he had slept little was evident from the pallor of his face and the dark lines under his tired eyes. The disorder of his blond hair heightened the somewhat desperate air that hung about him. He had turned away in disgust from the reflection of himself in the mirror, and, with a brush in each hand, had dropped into the arm-chair. He was too weary, too anxious to dress.

His blue eyes fixed themselves on the ashes in the grate and he stared in a kind of stupor.

"What a mess I've made of it!" he muttered, aloud.

By-and-by he put out his hand and took up a note that lay on the table. It was dated yesterday and read:

"DEAR MUIR,—If you are free between eleven and twelve to-morrow, could you look in and see me? I have something important to talk to you about.

"Yours truly,

"HECTOR WOLLASTON."

Muir read the letter for the twentieth time and tossed it back again on the table.

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"The music is going to begin," he said to himself. Still another *National* had appeared the previous day. In it there had been four long columns of passages taken from his own book and that of Christopher Love. A brief editorial called on him to explain; a letter from his publishers, received in the evening, invited him to do the same. He was to have dined with Agatha and Miss Leggett; but, not daring to face them, he had sent an excuse. Neither did he venture to present himself at his club-table. There had been a curious attitude towards him there for ten days past; and the studious absence of reference, even in jest, to the later charges in the *National* indicated that his friends were taking them seriously. He had dined miserably in a second-rate Boston restaurant, and had spent not only the evening but the night in trying to plan some consistent line of action.

He had found nothing better than that which he had followed hitherto—the line of passive denial.

"I know nothing whatever about it," had been his unfailing answer to all Agatha's petitions that he should defend himself.

No one else had as yet spoken to him personally on the subject, so that up to the present his system of lying had been simple. But now it must become more complicated. To the mass of proof that could be collected against him he must present a strong, unwavering front. He would not tell many lies. He would not expose himself by making explanations. He would keep to one non-committal formula: "I know nothing whatever about it."

"They can't dislodge me from that," he said to himself now. "They may break me down, but they

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can't trap me. My God, I'm already thinking like a criminal!" he exclaimed, almost aloud, and sprang to his feet again.

He planted himself before the mirror and began brushing his hair with hard, rapid strokes.

"Damn Paul Dunster!" he cursed, under his breath. "If he hadn't taken me by surprise, I shouldn't have let myself in for this. If I had had time to reflect a minute I shouldn't have denied before a tableful of people that I knew anything about Christopher Love and his book. I should have said, 'Yes, I know him, and I've incorporated some of his writing with my own.' That would have taken the wind out of all their sails. No one would have bothered about the little more or the little less. They would have taken my word for it without investigation. And now I'm in for this."

He threw the hair-brushes down and began searching in a drawer for a necktie. It was a proof of his agitation that he seized the first one on which his hand fell. No one in the university had such discrimination as he in what to wear around the neck. The *Lampoon* had even published a mock interview with him on the subject. In it he was made to say that, as the necktie is the only note of color in a man's costume, it should be consistent not only with his character, but with the duties or pleasures in which he engages during the day. Now he did not even look at what he was putting on. It was a tie of a striking tone of violet—one that he wore only when away from official duties or at a ball-game.

"I've got to stick to it now," he said to himself, as with deft fingers he fixed the knot in the opening of his

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high, stock-like collar. "That's the worst of it. What I said admits of no modification. I said I had never heard of the man. All the Wollastons will remember that, and if they didn't Paul Dunster is there to remind them of it. Then I must keep to it. I'd give all the credit the book has brought me to be able to say frankly to the world that I did borrow from him—but I've cut myself off from that."

He thrust the pearl pin into the knot with the same feverish carelessness, and turned away from the glass. If, in spite of his pallor and his tired eyes, he was remarkably handsome as he stood there in his shirt-sleeves—tall, erect, and blond—it was certainly not due to-day to any special attention to dress.

He put on his waistcoat and coat with the same hasty indifference. He gave a final glance at himself in the glass, but it was from habit, not from anxiety as to how he looked.

"Only nine," he said, turning to the clock. "Some of them will be still there. Fisher and Glynn always dawdle over their coffee. But I must face them. I can't wait any longer."

He put on a light autumn coat and went out. Once in the air he felt better. The freshness of the morning seemed to blow away many of the fears that had hung like cobwebs in his mind.

"After all," he reflected, as he walked briskly to breakfast at his club-table in Appian Way, "many a man has done worse. I didn't borrow from Christopher Love because I couldn't do as well myself. I did it only to save time and trouble. There was the old book, which I supposed nobody living had ever read, containing page after page of just what I wanted

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to say. Every writer uses the material he finds lying under his hand. Shakespeare is often only a metrical version of somebody else's prose. How was I to know that Paul Dunster of all men had been burrowing in such out-of-the-way rabbit-holes? I don't blame myself for anything except for want of presence of mind at old Wollaston's table. It's perfectly tragic that my reputation, my career, my marriage perhaps, should hang on the two or three words of reply that slipped out then before I could check them. Ah, there's Fisher. He's breakfasted, at any rate. But I mustn't show the white feather before him.

"Hallo, Fisher! I'm late," Muir said, aloud, as the instructor in history went by. Fisher only nodded.

"Is he in a hurry?" Muir asked himself. "Or does he mean to cut me? But there again my mind is taking instinctively the attitude of the guilty. I must fight that. I mustn't lose my own self-respect. I mustn't sink to watching other people's smiles and frowns and to guessing what they mean by them."

As he neared the house in Appian Way young Glynn of the Latin Department was leaving it.

"Hallo, Glynn! I'm late," Muir called out, cheerily.

"Yes," Glynn answered, and turned in the opposite direction.

"Go to the devil, you little snob!" Muir said, under his breath. As he ran up the steps the hot color started to his face. It was the first time in his life that this kind of slight had ever been offered him.

"I must be philosophical," he reminded himself, as he sat down at the deserted table. "I shall have a certain amount of cold-shouldering to go through

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and then it will be over. It is part of the situation and there's no help for it. I must expect it and when it comes I must keep my temper. I'm stronger and abler than all of them. I can make a moral *tour de force* and dominate them in spite of everything."

He gulped down the strong coffee as though it were brandy. It gave him courage and steadied his nerve.

"But it's the necessity for doing it all that is degrading," he reflected, further. "It seems incredible that I, Anthony Muir, should have come to it. I should have called myself a man of honor. I *am* a man of honor! I haven't an instinct that doesn't tingle with the pride of being upright. But I've got into this monstrous position and I can't get out of it. I lied once and now I've got to go on lying. It's frightful; it's damnable. It's as if I had slipped into a man-trap and were held fast. Because Paul Dunster surprised me into saying what wasn't true, I've got to build my future career on that one bit of falsehood. I've got to work on it and marry on it. I've got to throw dust in everybody's eyes—and in Agatha's eyes."

He swept the breakfast things away from him with a violent movement.

"Oh, Agatha!" he groaned, the words just hissing out between his teeth. "Well, after all," he went on, as he pushed back the chair and brushed himself free of crumbs, "after all, she's happier that way than if she knew everything. She believes in me, and anything is better than that she shouldn't believe in me. It's not only better for me, but it's better for her. It doesn't matter what I am as long as she doesn't know it."

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No man is what the women who love him think he is. He is perfectly aware of it, but it is useless to say so. That's his moral secret and they are all the happier for not being let into it. I sha'n't be a shade more dishonest than anybody else. Agatha's love for me will be founded on a trust that isn't justified, but I have yet to see the wife whose castle isn't built on some similar bit of sand."

He comforted himself with this thought as he went up Appian Way, crossed the Common, and continued towards Sever. He had a lecture at ten o'clock, and, at the idea of confronting the amphitheatre full of undergraduates, his heart sank with a new dread. They, too, had probably read the successive numbers of the *National*, and formed their own opinions. As he talked to them they would be sitting on him in judgment. It was possible that some of them might insult him.

"They'll not dare," he whispered to himself, as he swung across the Yard with long, rapid stride. "I can quell anything that's actually face to face with me."

They did not dare. The lecture passed off quietly. A few of the students stopped afterwards to consult him about their work. Then he gathered himself together for the interview with Hector Wollaston.

"Ah, there you are!" the old man cried, as the servant showed Muir into the study. "Sorry I had to ask you to come. Cuts into the morning, doesn't it? Now, I sha'n't get another stroke of work done before lunch-time. Come in. Come in. Sit down there in the arm-chair."

Muir entered and shook hands with cautious cour-

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tesy. The heartiness of the professor's greeting surprised him pleasantly, and yet he kept himself on his guard.

"I'm only too glad to come over, Mr. Wollaston," he said, politely, "if it's any convenience to you."

"It is a convenience—a great convenience. I've been worried about a little matter for some days past. There; taste this sherry. It's some Old Pinckney sent me after I'd taken a course for him on the origin of Portuguese literature. They all say it's good, but I don't believe it. I never touch it myself. Pinckney is no judge of wine. He's vitiated his taste by too many bitter speeches. I have to work this off on the younger generation, who drink it because they don't know any better."

"The flavor seems excellent," Muir remarked, eager to be propitiatory.

"Glad to hear you say so. There isn't one man in fifty who knows a good flavor from a bad one—unless it's among Frenchmen. Now, Muir, let's get to business."

He drew up a small chair and placed himself immediately before the younger man. Muir braced himself.

"I've only got to be simple, natural, and unwavering," he thought, but he could not keep his heart from beating faster.

"I think you know a young fellow named Charterhouse," the professor began, to Muir's surprise.

"A clever little chap—rather poor. Yes, I do know him," he answered promptly. "He's going to try to trap me," he said to himself, "but he'll have to be sharper than he looks to do it. I sha'n't be caught in any such by-track as this."

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"You're his adviser, I think."

"Yes, I am, sir; though, I'm sorry to say, I haven't seen much of him."

"I wish you'd seen more. He's the nephew of an old classmate of mine."

"If there's anything I can do for him, I shall be glad to look him up. Has he been going wrong?"

"He hasn't been going wrong exactly; he began wrong."

"He began wrong, but is going right," Muir suggested with a light laugh. He was beginning to feel more at ease. He fancied he had mistaken the professor's motive in sending for him.

"That isn't so far out of the way, Muir," the old man admitted. "The boy is building well on a bad foundation. That's the truth of it."

"He's hard-working and sober, as far as I've ever heard," Muir observed, his sense of relief increasing.

"His uncle, old John Charterhouse, of Philadelphia, has been writing to me about him. He's a good boy in his way, it seems. He studies well and lives on next to nothing, as a young man should. There's only one thing wrong—he stole the money that brought him here and that's putting him through Harvard."

"Good Lord!" Muir exclaimed, with a start. He half laughed and then grew suddenly grave.

"Yes," the old man went on. "His uncle has been writing to me. They've just found it out, it seems. The boy is an orphan. His father, who had gone to the bad, married in some low way, and this young elf is the result. He doesn't seem to have had any school but the gutter till John Charterhouse found him as a sort of waif. Charterhouse is a wealthy

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man and has a heart as big as a mountain—just the sort of man to do well by a boy. He put him into an orphanage for the first few years. After that he gave him a place in his office at two dollars a week and allowed him his evenings to himself so that he might go to night-school. Last year the imp was able to pass his finals and entered college in the autumn. John Charterhouse was proud of him, and gave him five dollars as a bonus for his six years' work. Now, at the beginning of his second year, it turns out that the funds on which he came to college, and which he was supposed to have saved out of his two dollars a week, he stole from his benefactor. What do you say to that?"

The professor tapped Muir on the knee, and then held himself erect with an air of one who has given an astounding bit of information.

"Say!" Muir returned. "I don't quite know what to say. It's at least an original way of doing evil that good may come. What do you think of it yourself, professor?"

"I think he deserves the extremest severity of the law, and so does Mrs. Wollaston."

"I suppose he does," Muir admitted, "but—"

"But what, now? You're not going to tell me that you'd have any pity on the chap?"

"Certainly not—certainly not," Muir hastened to say. "I was only thinking that as the boy is very young—"

"All the more reason why he should be sharply dealt with."

"And probably didn't realize the full extent of his crime—"

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"Then this will be an opportunity to bring it home to him."

"I was thinking," Muir pursued, "that if some one were to go to him—"

"Well, you're his adviser."

"And make him see what he has done, from the point of view of other people—"

"What good would that do?"

"That, perhaps, the boy would put himself right without our having recourse to harsher measures."

"That is to say, he'd grope his own way out towards what he ought to do."

"Something like that, sir."

"You think that when a young man has done wrong it's wiser to help him to retrace his steps rather than to punish him."

"You put it better than I could myself, professor."

"Well, now, I don't agree with you; neither would Mrs. Wollaston. She'd think prison wasn't bad enough for a boy like that, and so would I. But you're his adviser. You do what you think is best with him, and I'll get the uncle to consent. He's all for having him expelled from college and sent to jail. Now some uncles would be weak enough to think of the young rascal's future career—"

"That's a legitimate subject for reflection, sir, if you'll allow me to say so," Muir interrupted, rather sententiously. "I dare say that a generation ago—"

"In my time," the professor interposed, dryly.

"A generation ago," Muir went on, feeling himself more and more at ease, "punishment was the first thought suggested by crime; but now, with our more modern ideas, it's reformation. Most philanthropists

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consider the hardened criminal to be rare. They find that the wisest plan is to develop the good there may be in the worst of characters, rather than merely to chastise the evil. The good becomes, therefore, a counter-agent to the bad. Right-thinking acts on wrong-doing like remedies upon disease."

"Dear me! Dear me! That wouldn't be my way at all. But, as I say, you're the boy's adviser, so what would you suggest?"

"I should suggest, first of all, gentle measures rather than severe ones. I should go to him, if the case were left with me, and I should talk to him. I should try to arouse his conscience and let that act. I think it would. It might require a little time, but in the end, I believe, the boy would be his own best reformer. I should aim at having him go to the uncle and acknowledge his fault. If he did that much, his natural impulse would also be to make amends. Of course, I can't foresee details, but that's the general effect I should try to work for. I shouldn't resort to open or public measures except as a very last resource. To do so at once would be to break the young fellow's spirit in advance, without having given him a chance to put himself right. I feel very strongly that the majority of men who go down, do so because they had no chance to recover themselves after the first step that slipped."

The professor was silent a little while. He seemed to be reflecting.

"You're a wonderful man, Muir," he said, at last. "You've such good ideas. I'm told your book is full of them. Yes, I believe you're right. When a man has got into the wrong way the best agent to bring him back is his own conscience, if he has any left."

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Well, then, I leave it to you. I'll write to old Charterhouse and tell him to let the matter rest for the present. Meanwhile we'll see if the wrong-doer can't be brought round to acknowledge his own guilt and to make a fresh start on an honorable basis. Eh, Muir?"

In the last two words there was a queer, significant tone that caused Muir to start. For the first time he asked himself if there were not in the professor's words an underlying reference to a case other than that of Johnny Charterhouse. But he put the suggestion from him and rose to take his leave.

"Very well, professor," he said, cheerily, "I'll do the best I can and report progress to you later."

"Yes, yes," the professor muttered, as they went towards the outer door, "that's a remarkably good idea of yours, Muir. Rouse the conscience. Let conscience work. Let a man become his own reformer. Now, that's something I should never have thought of for myself. When I was a young man, if we could escape the punishment we didn't bother ourselves about the crime. But I see you're different. Your ideals are higher, there's no doubt about it. It's the progress of the race, I suppose; but old fellows of my age can't help a feeling of half-envious admiration when we see young lads of yours living up to a standard we couldn't reach. By-the-way," he added, as they came out into the hall and stood at the foot of the staircase, "when are you to be married?"

"Early in December, I hope," Muir replied.

"That's too soon. There's nothing like a long engagement, take my word for it. I'd tell Agatha I wasn't ready, if I were you."

"She wouldn't believe me. And she said the other

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night that your engagement to Mrs. Wollaston had been a very short one."

"Yes, and I've always been sorry for it," the old man declared, readily. "I made it a condition when I promised to marry my wife that the engagement should last two years at least. But afterwards she wouldn't keep it, she was in such a hurry."

A stifled cry came from overhead.

"Oh, Hector, how can you say so! Don't believe him, Mr. Muir."

"Well, if it wasn't that," the professor explained, as Muir went out, "it was t'other way round, which is much the same thing."

Muir walked homeward with a sense of relief.

"People may be thinking less about it than I fancy," he said to himself.

When he reached his sitting-room another letter was awaiting him.

"It's from Stubbs," he said, as he glanced at the address. "Wants me to take another lecture for him, I suppose. Why the deuce can't he take his own lectures?"

He tore the envelope open with an impatient jerk of the hand, but as he read his color came and went with swiftly succeeding emotions. The letter ran:

"DEAR MUIR,—I am requested by the other men at our club-table to inform you that your explanation of the statements concerning you, that have been appearing in the *National* for the last few weeks, would be received by them with interest.

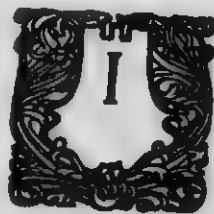
Yours very truly,

"PARKER STUBBS."

Muir stood motionless with the letter in his hand.

"Hmph!" he ejaculated. "They're going to turn me out."

XIII



IT was Muir's first taste of ignominy and he found it bitter. He had the pride of the man who has always been successful, popular, and sought after. In his own opinion his personality was something sacred. He was accustomed to find himself a favorite both in college and society. It was incredible to him now that in the little group of intimate friends among whom he had been one of the wittiest and most welcome he should not be wanted any longer. To be dropped by the members of his club-table was more of a disgrace, in his estimation, than to be discarded by his own family. As he took in the fact his eyes gleamed with anger. It was not in reason that Anthony Muir should be subjected to an insult. He had never accepted one and should not do so now. Flinging the letter into the smouldering fire he sat down at his desk and wrote, with quick, heavy strokes of the pen:

"DEAR STUBBS,—The tone of your letter surprises me. I am not aware that I owe explanations to you or anybody else.

Yours truly,

"ANTHONY MUIR.

"P. S.—I regret to say that since I have moved into Westmorland I find the distance between here and Appian Way will make it impossible for me to continue my membership of the club-table.

A. M."

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He felt better after the letter had been sent off, but when he went, an hour later, to eat his luncheon in a little restaurant near Harvard Square, it seemed to him as if the whole university were there to watch him going in. But he would not be humiliated in his own eyes. He carried himself loftily, and in the afternoon went to Sever to give another lecture. When it was over he took occasion to stop Johnny Charterhouse, as the young men were filing out, and ask him to come to Westmorland Hall in the evening. The boy—a small, pale, big-eyed lad of seventeen—flushed to the roots of his hair, but promised to be there at nine.

When Muir came out it was time to dress for his meeting with Agatha. He had not seen her for two days, even though she and Miss Leggett were waiting "to show him over" the house. He was to give his advice on the installation of the electric light and certain other changes to be made before the wedding. He shrank from doing it; he shrank from seeing Agatha at all; he shrank from her studied silence on the subject of his book as much as he had shrunk, a week or two ago, from her speaking of it; but it was all part of the situation he had to face. He could not swerve by a hair's-breadth from the line of conduct the most innocent man would have followed. So he dressed himself carefully, making up for his indifference of the morning. He knew that to hold his own he must make use of even the most trivial point that could tell in his favor.

At the door he asked for "the ladies," but when he had waited a few minutes in the white-and-gold drawing-room Agatha came in alone. As she entered

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his heart smote him with a quick pang. She was too superb a creature to be betrayed, and yet he must betray her. It was a new kind of remorse to him. Hitherto, in the situation in which he had been placed, he had had no pity but for himself; now, for the first time, he pitied her.

He stood at the end of the room farthest from the door and let her advance towards him. He did so not from lack of courtesy, but from delight in the picture she made as she approached. In the unconscious ease of her carriage there was something independent of externals—a dignity that came less from grace and beauty than from simplicity and straightforwardness of soul. The charm she exerted was of the sort to which outward trappings are of little or no importance. The large, black hat with long, white plumes, the soft, white feathery thing about her neck, the dress of chestnut-colored velvet, were mere fashionable details to which neither Anthony Muir nor any one else would have paid attention when she herself came forward with a smile upon her lips. She stopped at a little distance from him.

"You're very late," she said, in mock reproach.

"Am I? It's only a quarter-past four."

"I said four. You ought to have been here in advance of the hour rather than after it. To an ardent lover punctuality itself is late."

"I've just come from one lecture," he laughed. "I didn't know I was going to another."

"I have so many things to do that I don't know where to begin," she continued, when they had seated themselves on one of the gilded sofas. They sat side

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by side, but turning towards each other. "You see, Mr. Muir, I am going to be married."

"Indeed? To whom?"

"To a man who is as good as he is handsome and as clever as he is good."

"That is, you think him so."

"Everybody thinks him so."

"Everybody?"

"Well, everybody worth taking into consideration."

"Then there are some who don't?"

"Isn't it Tennyson who says, 'He makes no friend who never made a foe'? The man I'm going to marry has many friends. It is necessary, therefore, that he should have enemies."

She had decided not to speak again of the articles in the *National*, but she could not resist this covert allusion to the situation.

"And these enemies," Muir continued, "what do they say against him?"

"They pretend he isn't honorable," she said, boldly.

"They go so far as to say he isn't even honest."

She looked frankly into his face, and, though he winced inwardly, he controlled himself sufficiently to look back frankly into hers.

"And what do you think?" he asked.

"That is sufficiently shown," she answered, slipping both her hands into his, "by the fact that I'm going to marry him."

"But if other people turned against him?"

"I should stand by him all the more."

"But if even you lost faith in him?"

"I couldn't lose faith in him, because I have his word."

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"But if to discredit his word there were brought proof?"

"No proof would weigh with me if his assertion were on the other side."

"Then you believe in him to the uttermost?"

"To the uttermost and beyond."

They sat for a moment with clasped hands, looking each other in the eyes. Then his gaze fell before the truth in hers. He let his head sink for a second on her shoulder.

"Oh, Agatha," he murmured, "I'm not worthy of a wife like you."

To himself he was saying: "I'll make it up to her. I've got to betray her trust this once, but she shall lose nothing by it. I'll write other books and make her proud of me. I'll atone for everything, so that she shall never know her faith in me was built upon a lie."

When he lifted his head he was smiling. It had already become an instinct with him to remember, before everything else, to keep on the mask. She, too, smiled. With his eyes upon her the weight at her heart seemed to lift.

"I shall never lose my faith in you, Anthony," she whispered.

He hung his head again.

"Would you go on loving me," he asked, in a confused attempt to justify himself, "if in the end you found out that I wasn't worthy of it?"

"That couldn't happen. I shall never find it out."

They sat for a few minutes thus, till the moral discomfort grew too great for him. He moved restlessly in his seat and released her hands.

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"Isn't Miss Leggett waiting for us somewhere?" he asked, uneasily. "She said something about showing me the house."

He followed her from the room with the same gaze of admiration with which he had seen her enter.

"My God," he groaned, inwardly, "what a mess I'm making of it! But when this is over everything else will be true."

They came out into the hall and Agatha went towards the staircase. When she had taken a few steps up the stairs she turned suddenly.

"There is no truth in what they say, is there, Anthony?" she faltered.

"You're not beginning to doubt me, dear?" he questioned back.

"No, Anthony. I've never doubted you. But give me your word just once."

"I have given it—" he began to stammer.

"Implicitly," she explained. "But let me have it directly. Tell me just once that all these resemblances between your book and the other are the result of some strange chance. I *know* they are, but I want to hear it from your own lips. After that I promise you never to bring the subject up again. I shall never look at another number of that frightful *National*, nor go back to question the word you give me."

Muir stood for a second silently looking back into her eyes. He was quite conscious of his situation. He knew that the door of grace had been opened to him again. He knew that all his instincts of honesty were urging him on the instant to tell the truth and go. Yet when he spoke it was only to say:

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"I give you my sacred word of honor, Agatha, that of the asserted resemblances between my book and Christopher Love's I know no more than you."

She gave him her hand with a smile. He bowed over it and raised it to his lips. When she turned to continue her way up-stairs he followed her; but he told himself already that the dignified old home she was offering to make his was not worth the price he was paying. Nothing was worth it, not even herself and her love.

Miss Leggett met them at the head of the stairs and they went through the rooms together. Muir followed from chamber to chamber, trying to give his mind to the practical details under discussion, but he was unable to do more than utter a perfunctory yes or no as the various plans were laid before him. As soon as he could he made a pretext for leaving and hurried away. Agatha protested and said she had meant to take him with her to Mrs. Revere's afternoon party, but he insisted on going. She came with him to the door for a last word at parting, but he did not wait for it. He was eager to be in the air—anywhere—so long as he could be alone.

When he found himself in the street it was already growing dark. There were few people about, and he could slip along under the withering trees without being perceived. He followed one of the long, elm-arched avenues that lead towards Boston. He had no objective point, but he knew vaguely that by-and-by he must have something to eat. From the cheerful society of the club-table and old friends he was shut out; he must, therefore, go where he would be unremarked in the crowd.

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He walked slowly, his head erect, his face set grimly. For the first time he avowed to himself that his own self-respect was gone. It was a new phase in his mental condition. Hitherto he had done his best to maintain his own sympathy with himself, and he had been able to excuse himself to his own satisfaction. He had admitted that in borrowing from Christopher Love he had been guilty of a technical dishonesty. He had accused himself of stupidity, awkwardness, and lack of presence of mind. He had acknowledged that his position was painful and, in a certain sense, degrading. He had failed to keep up to the reputation of the Anthony Muir whom he had admired as a veritable Bayard of chivalry and honor. He had always meant to be above suspicion and beyond reproach. As he said of himself, he had not an instinct "that did not tingle with the pride of being upright." And yet he had gone wrong. It was almost incomprehensible to him how he could have done it. A year ago he would have said that nothing so impossible could ever happen to him and, now that it had happened, he could not accept the moral responsibility as his own.

"It's hard luck," he had been in the habit of saying to himself for the last few weeks. He blamed luck; he blamed Paul Dunster; he even blamed Christopher Love for having written a book and thrown temptation in his way; but he would not blame himself. From that necessity he had fled away into any hiding-place that the trees of his Eden offered him. He had had his reasons for doing so—reasons that were founded less on conscious principles than on instinctive knowledge of his own character. He knew himself

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able to fight with pluck against onslaughts from without; but he knew himself, too, to stand in deadly fear of the tribunal that sat within. Ever since the first accusations had been made against him he had been dodging the summons into that supreme court. He had not admitted to himself that he was doing so. He had purposely kept from analyzing his motives and from confronting his moral situation. There had been a kind of Dutch courage for him in the thought that he had enemies. He could face them when he could not face himself.

"I wasn't meant to play a game like this," he mused, bitterly, as he continued to walk towards Boston. Bad as things had been hitherto he had never been driven into the outspoken falsehood he had employed against Agatha to-day. The deception he had practised heretofore had been implicit. It had consisted in generalities or evasions or silences. If his conscience attempted afterwards to call him to account, he had been able to slip away from the charge. But to-day there was no way open. His action had been so direct and deliberate that he had been unable to escape his own detection. For the first time he had been caught and condemned—by himself.

With that talent for philosophical analysis which was part of his endowment, he was able to expose his situation for his own judgment. He could lay bare his conduct and separate motive from motive. He could say how far he had acted from love, how far from vanity, and how far from moral cowardice. Once face to face with himself his intelligence was too keen to allow further self-deception. His theft

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from Christopher Love he passed over as a matter of secondary importance; his thought centred wholly on the position which his denial of that theft had driven him to take up.

"I wasn't meant to play a game like this," he said to himself again. "I haven't got the requisities for it. It's a part that needs a man without the moral sense, and I'm handicapped by the knowledge that I have a soul. That's the key to the whole situation. I'm the typical man with a soul—the man who doesn't dare carry through a dishonorable enterprise to a splendid and triumphant end. The world is full of men who can do it, but I'm not one of them. In history they become emperors, and in private life millionaires. But I can't steal without suffering for it. I can't lie without being sent off into a moral hell. I suppose I could say to my soul what Lady Macbeth says to her husband:

'What thou wouldst highly that wouldst thou holily,
Wouldst not play false and yet wouldst wrongly win;'

and that, obviously, isn't a soul to tackle such a business as mine."

He came to a standstill on one of the bridges spanning the Charles. The night had closed in and all the lights were lit. The poorer quarters of the two cities faced each other, and from one to the other working men and women were trudging home from work. Tugs were puffing on the basin below, while over the bridge rumbled long lines of crowded electric cars.

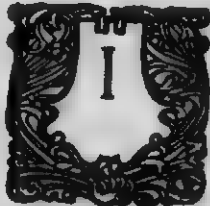
"It's a curious thing," Muir meditated, looking down at the black water, "that in this world the

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Jacobs who have spiritual aspirations should have to go through so much more moral shuffling than the Esaus who have none. Is it that moral shuffling is better than no power of moral motion at all? Or is it that the less a man happens to be lower than the angels the greater the splash he makes if he comes down? Or is it that if he catches a glimpse of the Beatific Vision the more the irony of life insists on making him unworthy to have seen it? It was when Moses came down from the mount that he broke all the tables of the law together, and it was after David had been crowned in Hebron that he fell in love with the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Well," he continued, moving on again, "that doesn't excuse me. There was at least something dramatic in them and their penances. Moses was shut out from the Promised Land and David lay prone all night upon the earth while the child of his adultery died. Nothing of that sort is likely to happen to me. I shall probably be allowed to go on lying till the storm passes. The best I can hope is that moral shuffling may bring me out where the road becomes smooth enough to walk straightforwardly once more."

It was not much of a hope, but it stayed him for the moment. On the strength of it he was able to eat, without much appetite, and to turn back towards Cambridge in time for his meeting with Johnny Characterhouse.

XIV

"T was two thousand dollars," Johnny Charterhouse was saying, at about ten o'clock that night. "I had the chance to take it and I took it."

The boy spoke frankly and simply, his big, gray eyes looking straight into Muir's. Muir himself leaned forward in his chair, touching the tips of his fingers together. The psychological problem presented by Johnny Charterhouse's case was taking his mind, for a few minutes, from his own cares.

"Didn't you expect to be found out?" Muir questioned.

"Sooner or later," the boy admitted, with the same frankness. "I calculated the possibilities as well as I could. I knew they might catch me at once, but at the same time it was money that no one was likely to miss at first. I thought I might even get through college before they detected me, and I decided to run for that chance. Of course, I knew there was risk; but it was the only thing I could do if I was to get an education at all. When you told me to come to-night I knew the game was up."

"You've had a pretty hard time, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Your father died when you were young. I think you said?"

"When I was a baby."

"And your mother?"

"I don't know when."

"Who brought you up?"

"My uncle paid for my keep in an orphans' home. When I was too old to stay there any longer he gave me a job in his office. I studied for college in odd hours and at nights. I knew I'd have to get an education if I was ever to do anything in life."

"How did you come to have so much money in your possession?"

"It was simple enough. I'd had it for some time before I passed my finals. Of course I knew it wasn't much use passing them if I couldn't go on and enter college. What I counted on chiefly was that my aunt might leave me something when she died. She'd come back from Europe sick, and we knew she couldn't get better. She used to go to Europe every year to buy dresses and jewelry for herself and the girls. Well, she died, but she didn't leave me anything. It was some time after the funeral that my uncle sent me to New York on a mysterious errand. I was to take a packet to the Collector of Customs there, deliver it into his own hands, and give no name. If my uncle hadn't insisted so strongly on the secrecy of the affair I shouldn't have been so sure of what was up. But little by little I figured it out, with the help of hints I had heard let drop at the time of my aunt's death."

"You mean that it was conscience-money?"

"Yes. My aunt had died a very religious death.

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Towards the last she'd got worked up over having cheated the Government the last few times she'd come from Europe. She reckoned it up at about three thousand dollars, I believe; but before the end came Uncle John had beaten her down to two. She made him promise to pay it after she died; and when he gave me the packet I had a pretty good idea as to what it contained. I opened it in New York. The money was in notes. That decided me. If it had been a check I couldn't have done anything with it."

"Of course not," Muir murmured.

"The only writing was in my aunt's own hand. It was just, '*Restitution to the Government of the United States for defrauding Customs.*' Well," the boy continued, monotonously, "I thought it over that night and I decided that the Government had less need of the money than I had. I knew by the nature of the errand that Uncle John wouldn't make any immediate inquiries, and I thought he might never make any at all. I didn't mean to steal the money. I meant only to get my education with it. Then I intended to pay it back to the United States Government, little by little, and secretly, in Uncle John's own way. It didn't seem to me to be stealing when I did it."

"And now?" Muir queried.

"I've put in a pretty mean year," the lad said, simply. "I've had two minds about coming back to college at all. I've thought some of paying over the money I have left—that's about fifteen hundred—to the Collector of Customs, and making up the rest as soon as I could. I've thought some, too, of clearing out to Europe with it all and making a fresh start.

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But I've come back. It seemed to me, in the end, that I ought to get an education if I could."

There was a moment's silence which Muir was the first to break.

"You've told me this very frankly, Charterhouse," he said. "You haven't tried to hedge or to keep anything back. May I ask why?"

"Because I saw you knew. When you began asking me about myself I could tell that some one had been giving you points. Besides, I never meant to deny the thing if I was taxed with it. I've done a good deal of lying about it first and last and I'm rather sick of it."

"You look upon yourself as an honest boy by nature?"

"I'd rather be honest than not," the lad said, with a wan smile.

"But having made a mistake and been dishonest, what do you propose to do?"

"I don't suppose that rests with me. My uncle or the United States Government will have the first say in that."

"I think," said Muir, "I can assure you that no action will be taken against you. In that case would you continue to use the money and remain at Harvard?"

"I'd like to do what was easiest," the boy answered, frankly. "I know what I ought to do. I ought to take the rest of the money back to Uncle John and confess the whole job. But I'd like to get out of it by a simpler way than that."

"What simpler way?"

"I don't know yet. I'd have to cast about and see."

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"When you've found it, will you come and tell me what it is?"

The boy promised, and soon rose to go away. He was so small and pale and prematurely careworn that Muir felt the pity of the strong and well-developed for the frail, under-sized thing that has never had a chance to grow.

"Come soon," he said, as he pressed the lad's hand; "you'll find me almost any evening about nine."

Left alone, Muir found his own anxieties return with double force. They wove themselves in with the confessions of Johnny Charterhouse and gave him a troubled night. He dreamed of crime and disgrace, and if he woke it was to think of his situation as even more frightful than it was. As he meditated in the darkness it seemed to him that daylight would bring one only course with it—to confess and go.

When he got up his ideas were more sober. The day was before him with its round of duties, and the natural thing was to do them. He gave his lectures, and in the afternoon spent a half-hour with Agatha. He made pressure of work once more a pretext for leaving her, and hardened himself against her look of gentle reproach. She talked gayly of the future, but it seemed to him that her brightness was a little forced. He tried to respond with his usual frankness, but he suspected that in his air the lack of spontaneity was as visible as in hers.

In the evening Johnny Charterhouse came again. When his timid knock sounded on the door Muir's heart gave a bound of welcome. He was conscious already of a curious companionship of soul with this poor waif of fortune.

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"Well?" Muir queried, when they had seated themselves after the first commonplace words of greeting.

"I've been thinking," Charterhouse said, with the wistful air of earnestness that Muir found pathetic—

"I've been thinking that if they don't do anything to me I might as well keep the money and get my education."

Muir was surprised at this moral retrogression, but he did not say so.

"Could you keep it," he asked, "and with it keep your own self-respect?"

"If I could get other people's respect I might manage to do without my own."

"Do you think we can ever do that, Johnny? When our own self-respect is gone, do you think we can ever win the esteem of others?"

"I mean," the boy explained, "that I could get along without self-respect for a while. Then when I'd got my education and worked and saved the money and paid it back I could begin respecting myself again."

"Can one start wrong and go right?"

"I think so."

"Wouldn't it be like expecting an arrow that was badly aimed to correct itself while on its flight towards the mark?"

"You couldn't expect that of an arrow, but you might expect it of a man."

"This isn't a question of theory," Muir said, shifting his ground, "so much as of experience. The world is full of ruined men who've thought they could do what they couldn't do and what they'd better not have tried."

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"But I should be ruined before trying if I confessed and gave the money back."

"You'd be ruined as far as Harvard and your education are concerned; but Harvard isn't everything and education isn't everything. Greater than either of them is the moral nature of the stupidest little freshman who ever crossed the Charles to Cambridge. For a man to give his self-respect for the sake of keeping his place in Harvard or anywhere else in the world is to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage."

"I know I should feel pretty mean," the boy admitted. "I've felt mean all along. But I figured it out that it would be like a disease that you could hide—bad enough, but not so bad as if it were where every one could see it. I guess I could bear the one if it didn't turn into the other."

"It would turn into the other. There's no hidden disease that doesn't show itself outwardly before long. When a man is consciously without self-respect people soon see, no matter what he does or says, that his moral life is rotten. It's hard enough, Johnny, for the man who begins right and goes wrong in spite of himself; but deliberately to start wrong is to strangle every power within you before you've begun your work. People do that sometimes. They lay a foundation that in one way or another isn't true. They try to build up fortune or profession or marriage upon it; but sooner or later their work is bound to come down like a house of cards. If I were you, Johnny—but no, I won't make any suggestions. You'll do the thing better by working it out for yourself."

There was a long silence during which Muir watched the boy. His face was expressionless, except for its

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wan sincerity, and the big, gray eyes wandered about the room as if without taking heed of the objects within range.

"If I did give the money back," Charterhouse said, at last, "I shouldn't be turned out into the cold. I'd have a home to go to. I've fixed that up already. Mrs. Brooks—that's a friend of mine—says she'd room and board me till I got work."

"Ah! Does she know all the—the details?"

"I went out to Roxbury and told her this afternoon. I figured it out that I ought to do it. I've been intimate at her house ever since I came to Harvard, and it seemed to me that I ought to tell her there was something wrong about me."

"May I ask what she said?"

"Nothing much. She cried a little, and said if I made up my mind to do what was right I needn't be without a home."

"Is she a person of means?"

"She's a dressmaker, and takes boarders—that is, she takes them when she can get them. Just now she hasn't any. Her daughter is studying to be a school-teacher, and I've helped her some with her work."

"That would certainly make it easier for you, Johnny—I mean that you've got a place to go to, if it was only for a week or two."

"Well, I'd feel pretty mean," the lad remarked, "but I feel mean anyhow. I don't see but what I've got to feel mean whichever way I turn."

"The eating of humble-pie can't be other than mean diet," Muir said, dryly. "The only possible comfort for those of us who've got to do it lies in swallowing the dose manfully."

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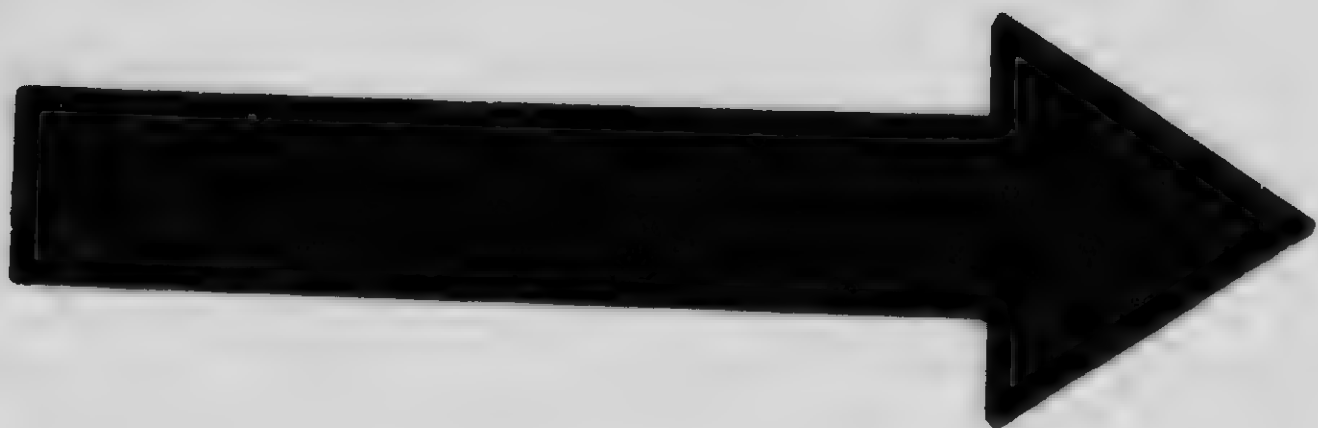
"Well, I'll think it over," the boy said, rising and shyly holding out his hand. "I'm much obliged to you, sir, for taking so much interest. I expect you look down on me a good deal."

"No, Johnny, no!" Muir assured him. "Why should I look down on you? You're feeling your way towards the right, and that's all the best of us can do."

When the boy had gone Muir threw himself back into his reading-chair and laughed harshly.

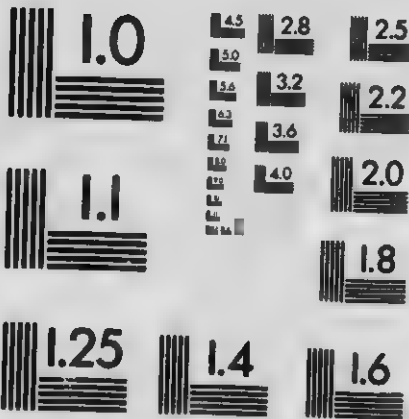
"Good Lord! who am I to look down on the lad?" he groaned, almost aloud. "And yet I can perform moral monkey tricks that ought to make me a wonder among mankind. I can see clearly to cast the mote out of my brother's eye even while the beam is in my own. Not all the saints in hagiology could do as much as that, and yet, like Johnny Charterhouse, I feel pretty mean."

In the few days that followed, Muir began to perceive that he was being left a good deal alone. He had not noticed it at first, but, now that he began to think of it, he could see that it was long since there had been any one "looking in" to see him, it was long since he had had an invitation, it was long since he had even been greeted in the usual friendly fashion in the Yard or the street. It was as if his acquaintances were making a ring around him and looking on. He had the chilly feeling of one who is being slowly forced outside the pale of fellowship. "Very well, I can stand it if they can," he said, grimly, to himself; but the sense of solitude gave him greater joy in Agatha's steady, smiling loyalty. He conquered his uneasiness in her presence and made no more pretexts for



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fleeing from her. He dined two or three times in succession with her and Miss Leggett, and the evenings passed happily. Then he came back to sleepless nights. Those were his worst times. He could get through the day somehow, especially with Agatha as a refuge; but the long hours of darkness were appalling. Wild schemes of saving himself passed through his mind then, only to be dismissed with the daylight. He slipped into a way of repeating to himself Johnny Charterhouse's formula: "I feel pretty mean. I shall go on feeling mean. And if," he would add, "if I betray the trust of the woman I love I shall feel still meaner."

For three days Johnny Charterhouse was absent from Muir's lectures. Muir watched in vain for the pallid face in the upper tiers of the amphitheatre and wondered what was happening. On the fourth day the boy appeared. After the lecture he lingered till the other students had gone. Then he came timidly to the desk where Muir was busy with his notes.

"I've done it, sir," he said, a faint color stealing to his cheeks. "I've been to Philadelphia and seen my uncle."

"Ah! I hope he wasn't hard on you?"

"He might have been harder, but he made me feel pretty mean for all that. He just took the money and told me to get out where he'd never hear of me again."

"And now?"

"Now I'm at Mrs. Brooks's. I've left college and I'm looking for a job. This will be the last lecture I'll attend. I expect I'll drop into something before long, but as I haven't been able to get an edu-

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cation it won't amount to very much. I thought I'd like to come to-day and thank you, sir, and say good-bye."

Muir looked at the boy for some seconds without speaking.

"You'll go on with your studies, Johnny?" he said, at last.

"I thought I might work some at nights, sir, if I have my evenings to myself."

"And I've no doubt I could help you," Muir observed. "I can't give you a degree, but we might make up something of what you'll lose in leaving Harvard."

Charterhouse began to stammer a response when Muir went on again.

"Mrs. Brooks's is in Roxbury, I think you said?"

"Yes, sir. Number 24 Greenland Park."

"Ah! I'll just put that down. Number 24 Greenland Park. Is it an apartment-house or a house by itself?"

"It's a small house by itself—white with green shutters. There's a little garden to it. It's pretty far out, but the cars are near."

"Is it," Muir questioned, absently, as though he were thinking of something else—"is it—clean?" He brought out the words with difficulty.

"Oh yes, sir. Everything is spick and span. Mrs. Brooks is a very lady-like woman, and so is Lucy."

"That's the daughter who is studying to be a school-teacher, I suppose? They take other boarders, I believe you said?"

"When they can get them. They haven't much of anybody now—except me."

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"Thank you, Johnny," Muir said, holding out his hand. "I happen to know some one who may—who may—want such a place as that."

The boy went away, but Muir sat still at his desk. He brushed the notes aside and let his head sink between his hands. When he looked up his face was set with the grim expression it wore in moments of determination. "What Johnny Charterhouse can do surely I can do," he said. He rose, gathered his books and papers together, and took his hat. Then, for a minute, he looked around the familiar amphitheatre.

"Good - bye, old hall," he murmured, under his breath. "You sha'n't see me here again. Anthony Muir is going under."

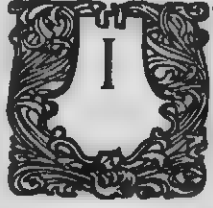
As he passed out he could almost fancy that the empty benches tried to make him speechless tokens of farewell.

In his room in Westmorland, Muir worked busily all that night writing letters, destroying papers, and making other preparations, as of a man going on a long journey. He had no need of sleep, but he was not excited. On the contrary, he was calm and his mind clear. When morning came he was haggard but not fatigued. He was eager to go on and finish what he had set himself to do. Having refreshed himself with a bath he went out for breakfast. Before he returned he sent word that he would give no lectures that day. Throughout the morning he worked with the same unremitting ardor as through the night. It was early afternoon before he had done everything to his satisfaction. At three he dressed himself with his usual care, preparatory to going out. Before doing so he unlocked a desk and drew therefrom a volume in old,

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dull brown. He opened it at the title-page and read, *A Treatise on the Human Conscience: Its Relation to Revealed Religion; and Its Influence on the Social Life of Men*, by Christopher Love. On the fly-leaf was written, "Andrew Muir, with the Author's esteemed Regards. Edinburgh, 1831." When he went out he had the book and three or four letters in his hand. At Agatha's door he was told that Miss Royal had gone with her cousin to call on Mr. Wollaston.

"So much the better. I may find her there," Muir said to himself, and set out to cross the Common.

"T isn't as if there was any hurry," Mrs. Wollaston reasoned; "and anybody must see that it's wiser to take the time for reflection before marriage rather than after it."

"But I *have* reflected, dear Mrs. Wollaston," Agatha argued. "I couldn't have my mind more firmly made up if I waited another year."

"That's nonsense, my dear," came from Cousin Abby Leggett. "A woman's mind is like an actress's complexion. It's made up one way to-day and another way to-morrow, according to the part she has to play."

"I'm not playing a part," Agatha declared, with a tremble of indignation in her tone. "I'm doing only what I know to be my duty."

She began to feel that in coming to see Mr. Wollaston this afternoon she had been led into an ambush. She had seen no reason for making the call; it was Cousin Abby who had invented some vague pretext for it and urged her to come. On arriving they had found not only the professor but Mrs. Wollaston, who should have been at her Bee, and Persis, who rarely stayed home in the early part of the afternoon. From the directness of the attack on her Agatha was sure the combination of forces had been prearranged.

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She sat on the sofa beside Persis, but when she began to suspect a trap she drew coldly away from the touch of the girl's hand. The professor was in his arm-chair by the fire, though up to the present he had said little. Mrs. Wollaston herself led the movement in front, with Cousin Abby Leggett to cover her retreat when Agatha's replies forced her momentarily to retire.

"Some people might think," Miss Leggett answered now, "that a large part of a girl's duty lay in listening to the advice of her elders."

"I'm not a child—" Agatha began, but the professor interrupted her.

"If you were," he said, "we could find more excuse for your rashness."

"And I'm not rash," Agatha returned, quickly, flashing an indignant look around on them all. "I know what I'm doing because I know the man I'm going to marry."

"Do you?" Miss Leggett asked, scornfully. "Then you're wiser than the child that knows its own father."

"No woman ever knows the man she's going to marry," the professor asserted.

"When she's lived with him forty years, as I've lived with Mr. Wollaston—"

"Then," said the professor, finishing his wife's sentence in his own way, "she's ready to confess that his nature is a riddle to which she never had the clew. The real Anthony Muir," he continued, addressing Agatha directly, "can't be to you other than as a book written in an unknown tongue."

"You're wrong, Mr. Wollaston," Agatha insisted.

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"Believe me, you're very wrong. There's nothing about him that I don't know. He's above me, I admit. He has a greatness of mind that I can only admire without sharing, but I *know* him!"

"Then," said the professor, thrusting out his underlip, "since you know him so well can you tell us to what extent he is indebted for his book to that of Christopher Love?"

"To no extent."

"Are you sure of it?" Mrs. Wollaston queried, in a pleading tone.

"I am sure of it," the girl replied.

"Then," the old man went on, "in what way do you explain the extraordinary coincidences in thought, language, and construction between the two works?"

"I don't explain them. I have no need to explain them."

"Come, now, Agatha," he persisted, "you're a girl with sense. You can't deny that you have some curiosity in the matter."

"And you can't deny," said Miss Leggett, "that when the articles first began to appear you were very anxious."

"I was never anxious in the way you mean, Cousin Abby. I was never anxious in the sense of doubting him or questioning the absolute rectitude of what he did. I was only anxious lest he should be misunderstood by his friends and the public."

"And how do you feel on that point now?" the old man asked.

"I feel pain that those who should have been his friends have not had the courage to be loyal. For

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myself, my confidence in him is only the more unshaken."

"You can't think, dear," Mrs. Wollaston said, gently, "that we would wilfully misrepresent Mr. Muir, or think ill of him without reason. When the newspapers all over the country have been taking the matter up—when it's the topic of conversation wherever people take an interest in either literature or social work—you can't expect us not to feel it very deeply."

"But at least he might have the benefit of the doubt," Agatha claimed. "You will admit yourself that that is no more than justice."

"Certainly, my dear," the professor agreed, quickly. "Since there is a doubt, by all means let him profit by it. But you should profit by it, too. As long as the doubt exists you should remember that it is a doubt and—"

"Oh, but there is none for me," she cried, hotly. "Whatever there may be for other people, for me there is only the fact that his honor is beyond all shadow of suspicion."

"But the other people you treat so scornfully have their rights," Cousin Abby observed. "We who are your kith and kin—we who've watched over you and brought you up when you were left alone in the world—have a certain claim to be considered. I don't speak of myself, but Cousin Hector and Cousin Fanny couldn't have loved you better if you had been their own child. And now, for the sake of a perfect stranger—"

"Oh, I hope nobody thinks me ungrateful," Agatha cried, looking from one to another, almost with tears.

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"You've all been so good to me. I feel it more than I could ever put into words, and you must know—you *must* know from the way we've all lived together—that your affection hasn't been wasted on me. But when a woman loves a man—I will say it—I'll speak my whole heart out plainly—when a woman loves a man as I love Anthony—when she has submitted herself to him and taken him as her guide—when she looks up to him and honors him and almost adores him—"

"Tut, tut," the professor muttered, to himself.

"My dear, do you think it's quite delicate—" Mrs. Wollaston began.

"I *will* say it," Agatha interrupted, passionately, her hands clasped tightly and her cheeks flushed. "I repeat it—when she almost adores him—then there can be no question of whether or not he's a stranger. He's everything to her, and the more other people fail the more she wants to be everything to him."

"I admit all that," the professor said, in a tone of calm discussion. "It's very natural at a certain time of life, when the nature is still capable of ardent, though perhaps somewhat illogical, impulses. Just let me finish, my dear," he continued, as Agatha tried to speak. "But please note that we're not asking you to give up Muir nor to break your engagement nor to desert him in his hour of trial—"

"That I should never do."

"No, of course you wouldn't. All we're begging of you is to put off your wedding till the whole thing is sifted out and we're sure that Muir's all right."

"Oh, Agatha," Persis whispered, creeping nearer, "do listen to them and put it off! It can't do you

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any harm, and in the end you'll be a great deal happier."

"Our wedding-day," said Agatha, firmly, "has been fixed for the 4th of December. Every one knows it. If I were to put it off now it would look as if I doubted him. You ask me to wait till his reputation is cleared when I know there has never been a stain upon it. I can't afford to put my marriage off. I can't afford to let any one suppose that I question the word he has given me. Don't think that I want to go against you, Mr. Wollaston, or you, Mrs. Wollaston, or you, Cousin Abby; but I can't do anything that would make other people think that my faith in him isn't absolute."

"We don't ask you to, dear," Mrs. Wollaston said, tremblingly; but before she could proceed the door was thrown open and Anthony Muir stood on the threshold.

The effect on all five was electrical. For an instant no one moved or said a word of greeting. Muir entered with his habitual ease, but when he came into the light they could see that he was pale and haggard. Mrs. Wollaston was the first to recover her presence of mind. She rose, tripped forward, and held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Muir?" she said, in the easiest tone she could command at the moment. "We were just speaking of you."

Muir bowed and skilfully avoided taking her hand.

"Indeed?" he returned, gravely. "I'm afraid it must have been a painful topic."

"Well, it was," the professor agreed, bluntly.

"I can understand that," Muir continued, "and

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I'm afraid I've come to make it more painful still. If you'll allow me I'll sit here," he added, turning towards Mrs. Wollaston.

He took a chair near the door. The lady returned to her seat, exchanging significant glances with Cousin Abby Leggett as she passed. Agatha's eyes were riveted on Muir. For the first minute he had ignored her presence, but as he sat down almost opposite her he looked at her squarely. He sat erect, holding the letters and the old brown volume in his hand.

"For what I have to say, I'm afraid I can't prepare any one who has been good enough to trust me." He spoke quietly, but to his own ears his voice sounded strained and harsh in the expectant stillness of the room. "I had better, therefore, go to the point at once."

"Anthony, you're not well," Agatha broke in, desperately.

"I'm very well, Agatha," he returned, in the same self-controlled manner. "For what I have to confess I can't plead any weakness of either mind or body."

"I think I'd better go away," Miss Leggett said, half rising.

"And I'll go with you," Persis cried, her voice catching in a kind of sob.

"No, please stay," Muir begged. "I'd rather you'd both stay. There's nothing private in what I'm going to tell. I'm speaking out before the world. This letter here," he went on, holding up one of the envelopes, "is to the *National*; this one is to the president of Harvard; this one is to Professor Campbell Love, of Detroit; this one is to my publishers. This book is

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Christopher Love's *Treatise on the Human Conscience*. It was a presentation copy to my grandfather. I wish to say that from it I took the scheme, a large part of the material, and some of the actual writing of my own book, *Society and Conscience*."

"But, Anthony—" Agatha cried, as if in protest against his words.

"I told you," he continued, addressing her directly, "that I knew nothing of the man, or of anything he had written. In saying that I lied."

"Anthony, you're not well," she cried again. "Don't say such things. Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston will misunderstand you."

"They won't misunderstand me," he answered. "They've guessed already what my state of mind is. I've lied directly to you, indirectly to them, and by implication to the public, till I've created my own chastisement. I think I can truthfully say, like Cain, that my punishment—the punishment, mind you, that my own soul inflicts upon itself—is greater than I can bear. It is certainly greater than my ambition, and that was great enough; it's even greater than my love for you, Agatha, and that was at first as pure and true a passion as a man ever felt for a woman. If I degraded it into a system of calculation and deceit, it was in the desperate effort to keep you at all costs. I can't go on with that. I can't betray you. I'm base enough; but my baseness stops just there, where, having won your trust, I'm obliged to fling it back to you and tell you it was misplaced."

"I don't understand," she murmured, putting her hand to her brow with a gesture of perplexity. "What does he mean, Mr. Wollaston?"

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"Perhaps I'd better explain from the beginning?" Muir questioned, turning to the professor.

"Please," the old man murmured. He was not looking at Muir, nor did he now raise his head.

"This book," Muir pursued, "came to me among those that my father inherited from my grandfather. I remember vaguely hearing from my mother that it was my grandfather's practice to buy the books written by his friends, even though presentation copies had been sent him by the authors. He did so especially when those books had not had a successful sale. In this way there were often in my grandfather's library two copies of the same work. When my mother came to Boston to sell my father's and grandfather's books, she kept for me one copy of all those of which there were duplicates. The others went where the chances of sale sent them. The second copy of Christopher Love's book found its way eventually to Paul Dunster."

"He burned it," the professor grunted, still without looking up.

"I myself," Muir went on, "was familiar with the outside of the book from childhood; but it was not until three or four years ago that I ever looked into it. When I did so I was struck by the modern tone pervading it. The author had opened up, seventy years ago, some of those very trains of inquiry which seem to belong especially to our own time. It was clear he had been in advance of his age; and it seemed to me that the book needed only to be rewritten, with an application to the actual life of to-day, to make it a real contribution to literature. I should like to say that I had no intention to steal from the

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book. My intention was only to appropriate its design and general trend of thought, and to work my own experience and reading on social subjects into them. It was in the actual writing of the book that I incorporated more from the original work than I intended at first. I did it chiefly as a saving of labor. In many passages—whole pages at a time—I had only to modernize the phraseology here and there. When I once began to borrow I must have gone on without paying much attention to the amount I was taking. There is certainly a greater similarity between the two books than I was aware of at the time of publication."

He paused an instant as if thinking out his next sentence. As he did so Agatha began slowly unbuttoning the glove on her left hand. Muir noticed the act and turned his eyes away.

"All this, however," he began again, "is of only secondary importance. The crime of which I accuse myself lies less in taking material from Christopher Love than in denying it after I had done it."

"Exactly," the professor assented, still with eyes downcast.

"When Paul Dunster," Muir went on, once more, "brought up the subject at dinner here, on the night when our engagement was announced, I was taken off my guard. The book had brought me a sort of reputation and I was vain. It had, above all, brought—brought Agatha—and me—together—"

He stammered and lifted his eyes towards her. She was drawing her glove quite off. It was the sort of action to stir his fighting blood and nerve him to go firmly on again, even though it must be in the way of self-abasement.

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"I lied then," he said, quietly. "I lied before you all. I lied chiefly out of vanity and from the fear lest Agatha should see one of my poor laurels plucked from me. Having begun then I had to go on. I had cut off my own retreat. There has been no way out of it—till now."

At the last word Agatha rose. She was pale and her face had grown hard. She said nothing and looked at no one. She crossed the room towards the door, and Muir rose also. As she passed him she drew off her engagement-ring and held it out in his direction. She did not glance at him and he took the ring from her without a word. When he held the door open for her she acknowledged the act by the slightest possible inclination of the head. Then she passed out and he closed the door behind her.

"I don't believe I need say any more," Muir continued, returning to his place, but not taking his seat again.

The professor nodded his head in assent. Mrs. Wollaston began to cry softly.

"I thought I ought to say as much as this—before going," he added. "Anything else you will imagine more easily than I could tell it, and it would only be more painful for you if I tried."

There was no reply to this. Only Miss Leggett and Persis looked at him at all. There was a second or two of dead silence broken only by Mrs. Wollaston's gentle sobs. Then, with a bow of leave-taking to which there was no response, Muir took up the letters and the brown volume he had brought with him and left the room.

He was at the street door when he heard a light step behind him.

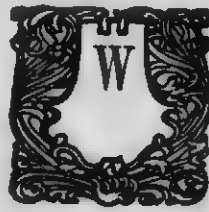
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"Mr. Muir," Persis whispered, scarcely finding voice to speak, "I want to shake hands with you and tell you that I shall always be your friend."

"Thank you," he said, as he pressed her hand in return. "It will be something for me to remember."

Then he passed out into the bright autumn sunshine, where all the familiar life was going on just as cheerfully as if he had not cut himself off from it forever.

XVI



WHEN Anthony Muir appeared at 24 Greenland Park, the news of his downfall had preceded him. An afternoon paper, given to personalities, had told the story on the previous day. In the evening it had been the subject of conversation between Mrs. and Miss Brooks and Johnny Charterhouse. It saddened what would have been otherwise a cheerful supper-table, for during the day the boy had secured a small place in an office in the city and was prepared to enjoy himself.

"I'd heard it talked of while I was at Cambridge," he explained to the ladies, "but I didn't pay much attention to it. Well, it doesn't prevent him from being the best man in the world," he added, loyally.

"I don't see how that can be," Lucy Brooks objected. "He's cheated some people and deceived others. He as much as says so himself."

She was a pretty girl, of that delicate type of prettiness characteristic of the latest feminine evolutions of the old Yankee heritage. From the days of the seventeenth-century immigrations her ancestors had been village people in the agricultural regions that depend on and support Boston. They had respected themselves, perhaps not unduly, as being the equals of the best, and so they had bequeathed to Lucy

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Brooks a poise of the head in which independence rivalled grace. Her fair hair rolled splendidly away from the whitest of brows and set her small, smiling features in a frame like a picture. "Really, that girl might be anybody," her mother's genteel customers sometimes said of her, and it was true. Lucy Brooks, with her blue eyes, her slender waist, her tapering hands, and her American air of being ready for whatever life might require, could have been any one—from a shop-girl to a princess. As a matter of fact, she was preparing herself to teach school—not from irresistible drawing to the task, but from a practical idea that it would be an agreeable way of earning a living. In the intervals of study she helped her mother with the sewing and the housework, and, notwithstanding the variety of her occupations, she found time to accept certain pleasant attentions from those whom she called "the boys." It was to be regretted that her success in passing examinations had not kept pace with the flowering of her good looks; and now when she was seventeen she had to confess herself below the standard her future career demanded. For this reason she worked hard and puzzled her fair head over dry problems and ancient tongues with which beauty should never have been asked to vex itself. A year ago she had been nearly in despair, when Johnny Charterhouse—whom she knew through some Roxbury lads at Harvard—shyly offered his help. He was so small, so wistful, so different from the brisker, bigger, stronger "boys" of her acquaintance, that she had had no hesitation in accepting his aid and sometimes letting him work with her in the evening. Now, because he had left Harvard, and was

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under a cloud, she was slightly scornful of him; and since he had come to the house to live she had studied in her room alone.

"If he's cheated people, so have I," Charterhouse said, with characteristic simplicity; "but I hope it's in me to pick up again."

"I'd like to know why it ain't," Mrs. Brooks exclaimed, warmly. "If every one who ever fell was lamed for life there'd be a terrible sight of people going on crutches."

Mrs. Brooks was Lucy with the difference of twenty years disparity in age and greater sturdiness of mould. She had grown up in the country and had married there. When her husband came to seek his fortune in Boston—as a clerk in the city—she had followed him; but she had never lost her simple village ways and forms of speech. Rather tall, slightly angular, with shrewd, gray eyes looking from a sweet, strongly set face, she was the type of the Yankee woman of the elder generation—capable, kindly, ready to turn her hand to any task and shrinking from no reasonable burden. Her voice had the nasal quality inherited from an old-time Puritan stock, and in her inflections there were those long-drawn, "down-east" cadences that are at once plaintive and emphatic.

"Still," said Lucy, in rather cruel response to her mother's words, "it's nice to be able to keep on one's feet."

"It's nicer," Mrs. Brooks rejoined, "to help folks that are down to scramble up again."

"And it's nicest of all," added Johnny Charterhouse, "to find people who don't want to jump on you because you've tumbled."

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"I should never want to jump on any one," Lucy declared, with a toss of her head. "I'm perfectly satisfied with passing them by."

"Like the priest and the Levite in the Bible," Mrs. Brooks suggested.

"But, ma," Lucy argued, "you forget. That poor man had fallen among the thieves. He wasn't one of them."

"Well, it ain't the first time," said the mother, with gentle promptness, "that a thief has repented."

"But that doesn't make him as good as if he hadn't been a thief at all," the girl returned, pertly.

"Lucy Brooks, you hadn't ought to talk like that before poor Mr. Charterhouse," Mrs. Brooks expostulated, later in the evening; "you'll make him feel bad."

"I've no patience with the way he goes on about that awful Professor Muir. The idea! A man who's had to run away from Harvard! And, to hear Johnny Charterhouse, any one might think he was a hero!"

"I s'pose," Mrs. Brooks explained, "that it's because he's thinking less of the one thing the poor man has done wrong than of the good many things he's done right. I shouldn't wonder if that's the way you'd like folks to think about you."

"Oh, I'm not particular," the girl answered, with the insolence of youth and prettiness. "If any one wants to take me on my worst side I can stand it."

"Then you're luckier than the rest of us," the mother said, seating herself, with her sewing, beside the light. "We common folks have to be taken at our best or we make a pretty homely show."

Lucy went to her studies, and Mrs. Brooks

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stitched in silence. As she did so her mind dwelt much on Muir, partly because of the help he had given Johnny Charterhouse and partly because of the haunting effect of the word *RUIN!* in large letters, that had formed the head-line to his story in the afternoon paper. She knew but vaguely what his ruin was, but it seemed to her tragic that a handsome, wise young man, such as Johnny Charterhouse reported him to be, should come to such misfortune. It was natural to her to dwell more on his suffering than on his sin, and as she stitched she sighed softly. Before she went to bed she prayed for him, and she did the same next morning. When Johnny Charterhouse had gone to work, and Lucy to her school, the shadow of the ruined man seemed to follow Mrs. Brooks about the house and to lean over her as she bent above the cutting-board.

"I vow," she exclaimed to herself, at last, "I couldn't feel worse if I'd known him."

She was sewing by the parlor window in the middle of the afternoon when she saw a tall, fair man stop before the gate and look long at the house. He was like a Viking, but a Viking crucified. Mrs. Brooks knew by instinct who he was.

"Step in, sir," she faltered, when he had knocked.

Muir entered slowly and followed her into the parlor.

"Mr. Charterhouse isn't in," she explained, for the sake of saying something, when they had sat down. "You'll be glad to hear that he's got work. He's a very up-and-coming young man and ought to do well."

"That's good," Muir said, dully. "But I didn't

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come to see him. I came to see you My name is Muir—Anthony Muir."

"Oh, I know. I could tell who you were the minute I saw you."

"I'm in a good deal of trouble—" Muir began, finding it difficult to tell the story over again.

"I know all that," she interrupted, hastening to spare him further explanations. To herself she was saying, "Perhaps the Lord has sent him to me to help him—as He sent Elijah to the widow woman of Zidon."

"And I thought," Muir went on, "that as you had been so good to Charterhouse—perhaps—if you had another room—"

"I've a beautiful room, sir—the front chamber—with sun on it all day long, and nobody on that floor but Mr. Charterhouse."

They discussed terms and arrangements and, in a few minutes, went up-stairs to inspect the apartment.

"You mustn't think it 'll be like this," she apologized. "It hasn't been lived in this long spell back. I'm sure you'll be pleased with it, and that I could make you comfortable."

On entering the humble, respectable room which was to be his future home, Muir looked about him in a dazed way. It was as if he had passed into a world where his mind could not work. Mrs. Brooks's plaintive nasal inflections might have been those of an unknown language.

"If you think it too dear," she ventured, timidly, mistaking his silence for hesitation, "we might say two dollars less."

The detail brought him back to himself.

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"Oh no," he said, quickly. "It isn't too dear. If you can be ready for me I'll come to-morrow afternoon."

"So do, Mr. Muir," she urged. "I'll be quite ready, and more pleased than I can say to have you."

Mrs. Brooks did no more sewing that afternoon. Muir's footsteps had scarcely ceased to sound on the brick pavement of Greenland Park before the two windows of the front chamber were wide open and she had begun taking the carpet up. The father of the prodigal did not kill the fatted calf more eagerly than Mrs. Brooks rubbed and scrubbed and scoured all that day. She went about the house gleaning the best furniture from all the rooms—the pretty toilet set from Lucy's, the muslin curtains from her own, and the sateen eider-down quilt from Charterhouse's. Mrs. Brooks would have made any contrite sinner welcome, but when the penitent had deep, mournful, blue eyes and a sweeping, blond mustache, she was too much of a woman not to feel that it was a case in which remorse was flavored with romance. As a Harvard professor he brought added dramatic contrasts to the situation, just as a fallen angel must always reflect on earth something of the glory of the heights from which he fell.

It was, nevertheless, with some misgiving that Mrs. Brooks confessed to Lucy, on her return, the doings of the afternoon. "Well, ma," the girl protested, "we might as well set up a home for lost dogs at once, or give out that we're keeping a reform school. I'm sure the boys will stay away from the house altogether." But she did not object to the appropriation

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of her toilet set, and Mrs. Brooks was discreet enough to let the subject rest.

Muir arrived towards dusk on the following afternoon. He greeted Mrs. Brooks in the absent manner he had displayed yesterday, and went straight to his room. It was a disappointment to Mrs. Brooks, on showing him up, that he did not remark the improvements effected or express his pleasure in the good taste with which they had been made. He waited with evident impatience for her to leave the room; then he shut the door.

She could not know, good soul, that in coming to profit by the welcome and comfort she was so ready to bestow he was only tasting the first material bitterness of his disgrace. The immediate impression on him was like that on the criminal when, after the excitement of the trial and the journey to prison, he reaches the emptiness and silence of the cell. One glance at his new surroundings brought home to Muir—by nature sensitive to externals—the change that had come over his life. He dropped into a chair and stared stupidly about him.

Hitherto he had been busy. From the moment when he had closed the Wollastons' door behind him he had scarcely taken the time to eat or sleep. He had toiled feverishly at the preparations for his departure. He was breaking his bridges behind him, and he was eager to be gone. But while the work lasted it was work. He was in his old surroundings and amid the symbols of the duties that had made up his life. They were dead symbols to him now, it was true, but death is never quite death as long as the form we have loved has not yet been put away. Muir

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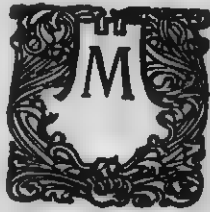
could still look out of his windows and see the familiar life going on. He could hear the voices of students going to and fro in the hall and the tramp of their feet. In spite of what had happened he was still at Harvard, where his life since childhood had been passed and all his interests were centred. Here and there he had glimpses of the red brick walls behind the elms, and not far away was the stately eighteenth-century roof beneath which, as he suspected, Agatha Royal was eating out her heart. He had suffered more than he knew that it was possible to suffer out of hell; but at least he had suffered there, amid the material conditions he knew, and with the externals of the life he had lived hitherto lying all about him.

And now it seemed to him as if he had suddenly dropped out into space. Everything was different. In Greenland Park he could not have felt farther away from Harvard if he had put out to sea. In Mrs. Brooks's modest, clean front chamber it was not the luxury of Westmorland Hall that he missed, it was that sense of work to be done which had given him a motive for existence. It was as if everything had gone. There was nothing to think about, nothing to do. There was no reason for his being here more than elsewhere; there was no reason for going elsewhere rather than for staying here. He had not even the pressing sense of being obliged to work for a living, for, after paying back to his publishers as much money as the book had brought him, he had still a few hundreds of dollars a year to stand between him and want. He had no employment, no friends, no future, no honor left. He had reached the negation

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of everything. He could only sit stupidly, letting himself sink into lethargy and numbness, while the darkness filled the little room, and Mrs. Brooks stood trembling at the door, wondering whether she dared to take him in a cup of tea.

XVII



MUIR refused Mrs. Brooks's cup of tea as he refused all her well-meant attentions the next day and the next and the next. In the recesses of despair into which he had withdrawn he was inaccessible to small acts of sympathy. As far as he was able, he shut himself up in darkness and solitude, shrinking from the approach of anything human as from that which hurt him most. In the great city, throbbing with the beat of kindly hearts, and eager in the pursuit of healthy interests, there was no place for him. A man without honor could not be other than an outcast from the round of fellowship. Muir knew it and did not complain. He no longer upbraided fate nor took the trouble to call down curses on himself. He accepted the chastisement that had overtaken him, and only sank under it into speechless, emotionless apathy.

If he had any active desire it was for closer secrecy and deeper seclusion. He thought, at times, of seeking it in some little-known West Indian or Pacific island, where no sound from the outside world would reach him. He thought of a monastery he had visited in the Italian hills, where he could bury himself alive. He thought of the teeming quarters of London or Paris where he could be lost to ken. He thought of

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death more than of anything else. Not to have to eat and sleep! Not to have to wake into his empty world and to take up again his useless existence! Not to be stretching out aching arms to the shadow of a woman who could never think of him but in scorn! Not to have to know himself as himself!—to be rid of the intolerable burden of his own identity! These possibilities lured him; but again he shrank from seizing them with the hesitation of a man who believes he has a soul.

"If I didn't believe that," he said to himself, "I'd do it. But I believe it and I can't."

So he stayed on in the peaceful suburban propriety of Greenland Park—where neat wooden cottages stood in rows, where life was neighborly, and the boys and girls sported gayly in the evenings. Never was there a more commonplace background to an immense spiritual desolation. To Muir's intellectual fastidiousness it was part of the irony of his lot. Instead of the rock of Prometheus, with the eagles eating out his heart, he had Mrs. Brooks's clean front chamber with its innocence of everything poetic, penitential, or picturesque. But it did not matter. Nothing mattered. It makes no difference to the drowned man what sort of shore hangs above the waves where he is tossing.

And it was as a drowned man that Muir looked upon himself. He could not have been more suddenly and completely cut off from the world he had known if he had leaped from a cliff and disappeared. When his confession had become public, silence had settled round about him. From the people among whom the greater part of his life had been spent there had come no

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word of reproach or blame—there had come no word at all. In the two or three brief interviews he had been obliged to hold with men in official positions in the university there had been only the laconic acceptance of the fact that he had nothing to do but go. There had been neither condemnation of his crime nor commiseration for his downfall. There had been a studious absence of comment and an obvious implication that the sooner he effaced himself the less painful it would be for all concerned. So he went in silence. During the days in which he worked at his preparations he thought it possible that Fisher or Glynn or Parker Stubbs might come to send him off with one pressure of the hand in memory of the days they had spent together, but no one appeared. So be it. It was less embarrassing for him and them. When he received from Agatha Royal the packet containing the presents he had given her he searched it through and through in the hope of finding even a bitter or disdainful word; but there was nothing—nothing but the address, and that written by another hand. So be it. It was easier for himself and her. When he went down the stairs of Westmorland Hall he knew that every human tie of his was broken, that every relation of friendship or love he had ever known was at an end. He went, consciously leaving everything behind him, out into a world where, if he began at all, it must be in every sense from the very beginning again. In prison the criminal has some one to come now and then to ask for him in the parlor; but Anthony Muir was aware that in his dishonor he would be left gently, though rigorously, alone.

It was not strange, therefore, that Mrs. Brooks's

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tender solicitations made no appeal to him. In his place of torment he was beyond the touch of the poor human hand bringing a cup of tea or an extra blanket for his bed. That might comfort the sick or the stricken or the condemned to death, but not the man who is hiding under a cloak of shame. Anthony Muir waved all material attentions aside, from a sense not so much of their insignificance as of their unfitness to his state. When it was necessary to eat or drink he took long walks into the Italian quarter of the city, where it seemed to him that, for the time being, he had the shelter of a foreign land. He went out as little as possible before dusk and he returned only in time to fling himself on his bed for the dream-haunted night. In the hours of daylight he smoked and did nothing. There was nothing to do. From the few books he had brought with him he turned away in revulsion. Books would be but empty caskets to him from now henceforth. On the table in his room Mrs. Brooks had been careful to put paper and pens, but they were as useless to him as to a blind man. What should he write now? The very name of Anthony Muir to a letter, an article, an essay, or a book would mean its instantaneous rejection. He had nothing but his intellect to offer to the world, and now—after his confession—the world would be obliged in self-respect to laugh such an intellect to scorn.

"I must start all over again at something else," he would say to himself, when his mind awoke for a few minutes from its paralyzing lethargy. "But how and where and at what?"

A week passed, and to these questions he had found

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no answer. And yet the natural impulses of energy and strength were beginning to assert themselves. With the adaptability of youth he was growing accustomed to his fallen condition. There were moments when it almost seemed to him as if he had never known any other. The seven days that separated him from his life at Harvard might have been seven years. It was not that he suffered less, but he suffered with some consciousness of what was immediately around him. He became aware of Mrs. Brooks's small, assiduous kindnesses, and one day, in going out, he stopped to thank her.

It was not much, but it pleased her, and she reported it to Lucy in the evening.

"Ma, you make me tired," the girl responded, scornfully. "I wouldn't stand that man's airs another day if I were in your place. Here you've been doing for him and doing for him for a week past, and he scarcely notices that you're alive. I haven't even set eyes on him, and neither has Mr. Charterhouse. It makes me uneasy to have such a mysterious creature in the house."

"I feel to do it, Lucy," Mrs. Brooks insisted, plaintively. "I can't help believing the Lord has directed his steps to us to some good end."

"I should like to know what it is, then," Lucy demanded. "There hasn't been a boy, nor the shadow of a boy, come near the house since he arrived."

"I know it's hard on you, child; but I'm sure you're willing to give up a little pleasure if there is a chance to do him good."

"I haven't made up my mind about that," the girl flung back, as she flaunted off to her studies.

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That evening Muir came home early. The night was wet and windy. On leaving the queer foreign eating-house where he had dined he tramped about in obscure streets, trying to fatigue himself into the mental and moral numbness which was his only chance of peace. But the sheer physical discomfort of wind and rain were too much for him. For the first time he thought, with a faint gleam of pleasure, of the snug little room in Greenland Park, with its shaded lamp, the arm-chair drawn up beside it, and his pipe on the table. There was nothing to do there, it was true, but it was at least a refuge from the storm outside.

And yet when he returned he was sorry to have done it. Once established with his slippers and his pipe the vacancy of the long hours before he could sleep appalled him. He tried to read, but threw the book from him without having found the place. His mind was more than usually awake, and his thoughts went back to all the pleasant occupations of which he could have had the choice that night if he had not fallen. In the blue rings of smoke that curled upward into the shadows he seemed to see Agatha Royal's face, with its faithful smile of welcome.

"I'll go mad if I think about that," he cried to himself, and sprang to his feet with the desperate determination to go out again. As he did so a timid knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," he called, impatiently, expecting to see Mrs. Brooks with one of her numerous forms of refreshment.

But it was not Mrs. Brooks, it was John Charterhouse.

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"I thought, sir," the boy faltered, overwhelmed by his own boldness, "that if you hadn't seen the evening papers you might like to look at these."

He thrust the papers hastily on the nearest chair and, before Muir had time to thank him, disappeared.

Muir stood for a minute slightly bewildered. Though they occupied adjoining rooms, he had almost forgotten the lad's existence. He had not shrunk from seeing him; he had too little pride left for that. He had only been too deeply sunk in his own misery to think about him at all. Now the recollection of a certain similarity between their fates returned to him, and he was conscious of the slightest possible sense of satisfaction in the knowledge that some one with whom he had an incipient sympathy was near at hand.

The incident changed the current of his thoughts, and he gave up the idea of going out. He took the evening papers with some misgiving and sat down to look them over. They were the first he had seen since he had read, eight days ago, the article on himself with the flaring head-line *RUIN!* He glanced hastily through the pages, dreading to find some mention of his name; but it was a relief to see that he was apparently forgotten. Then he began to scan the news, as he used to do in the days when the world had still some interest for him.

Nothing of importance had happened, and yet, in spite of himself, he read with the absorption with which one reads after having been cut off from the sources of information by a week at sea. He was surprised, in the end, to find that he had forgotten his cares for a little while and that the evening had

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sped away. He was grateful to Johnny Charterhouse, and before going to bed he passed to the boy's door and told him so. He found Charterhouse writing by the light of a student's lamp. At his elbow on the table was a dictionary. Muir's heart gave a feeble bound at sight of the familiar symbols of intellectual work. It was like suddenly seeing a resemblance to a dead face in a living one.

When he had returned the papers and expressed his thanks for them, he accepted Charterhouse's confused invitation to sit down. For the first minute neither thought of the change in the situation since they had last met. They talked of what Charterhouse himself had done in the way of getting work.

"But I'm glad to see you turn your evenings to good account," Muir said, with a glance at the dictionary.

"I'm afraid it isn't what you'd call study," Charterhouse explained. "In the house where I'm engaged there's a good deal of foreign business, and the clerk who writes French is going to leave. So I thought that if I rubbed up the French I know I might have a chance of getting his place."

"That's a good idea," Muir said, approvingly. "Just how are you doing it?"

"Well," Charterhouse went on, shyly, "it's all in the translating and answering of correspondence. What I'm doing is to make up imaginary replies to imaginary letters. I'm hunting for the correct business terms."

"Just let me see."

Muir took a small chair, and, drawing it up to the boy's side, looked over his shoulder.

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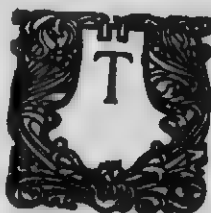
"That's not bad," he commented, when he had run through what Charterhouse had written. "There are a few quite common expressions that you've mistaken. There, for instance, '*Je prie de vous informer de la réception de votre lettre*' isn't a good way of saying 'I beg to inform you of the reception of your letter.' Better put, '*J'ai l'honneur de vous accuser de la réception,*' et cetera. And there again, '*marchand en gros*' is 'wholesale merchant,' not '*marchand en grand.*' There's a grammatical error; *marchandises* is feminine and plural, not masculine and singular. And I see, too, that you're a little weak on the agreement of the past participle. You're quite right here in saying, '*quand nous aurons reçu votre lettre,*' but down there it should be, '*la lettre que nous avons reçue.*' Now, suppose you start afresh and write it over again?"

Charterhouse thanked him and did so. Muir waited and made new criticisms. When he rose to say good-night it was already late, and for the first time in long, weary weeks he was sleepy.

"We'll go on with that to-morrow night, Charterhouse," he said, as he was leaving. "When Downing & Co. have lost one French correspondent I think we can be sure of having another ready to put in his place."

On returning to his own room Muir did not analyze his emotions. He did not ask whence came the faint sense of comfort that stole over his heavy heart. He was hungry, and he ate the biscuit and drank the glass of milk Mrs. Brooks had placed on his table in his absence. He was tired and went to bed. The human hand, stretched out to him through the darkness, was touching him at last, and, unconsciously to himself, he was beginning to respond to it.

XVIII



THE storm was wild that night, and the next day it was wilder. Muir remained in his room writing letters for Johnny Charterhouse to answer. He made himself Monsieur Durand, of Paris, and Monsieur Dupont, of Bordeaux, and took pains to introduce all the technical terms he could think of in connection with leather, wool, or wine. The task gave him a double pleasure. It brought into play once more the mental faculties for which it had seemed he would never have use again, and it appealed to his instinct for teaching. To teach was one of the first needs of his nature. In the development of an idea or the expansion of a mind he had the same delight as the artist in the evolution of a picture or the conception of a rôle. So, in entering into Johnny Charterhouse's humble efforts to obtain a better place, Muir was getting back to the ground on which he was at home. He did not state the fact to himself or take notice of its significance; he only knew that the stormy day passed quickly.

It was when the dusk was gathering, and Muir stood at a window, thinking with dismay of the long, wet walk he must take to reach his Italian restaurant, that Mrs. Brooks suddenly appeared at the door. "Something told me to do it," she explained to Lucy,

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afterwards, when the results of her proceeding had taken shape. "I couldn't bear to think of that poor man turning out into the storm only to get something to eat, and us with plenty of good victuals ready to set on the table. And just as I was a-thinking it over something told me to walk right up and ask him to supper."

Muir declined the proffered hospitality, partly through fear of giving his hostess trouble, and partly from a sense of awkwardness in putting himself on exactly the same level as Johnny Charterhouse. In spite of all that had happened he had a certain dignity to maintain. He preserved it better—or so it seemed to him—amid the picturesque dirt of the Italian quarter than would have been possible in the unromantic cleanliness of Greenland Park. But, notwithstanding his hesitation, "something told" Mrs. Brooks to press her invitation home.

"You don't know how I sh'd love to have you, Mr. Muir," she quavered. "My daughter Lucy'll be to home from school, and she'd admire to make your acquaintance; I know she would. And such a night, too! It's enough to give any one their death just to face it. I can't bear to think of your turning out into it when we've plenty and to spare in the house."

Muir yielded with some misgiving, but when he went down, an hour later, to Mrs. Brooks's modest dining-room he did not regret having done so. It was bright and cheerful, and the supper was of the simple, wholesome variety he had eaten many a time in summer rambles through Vermont or New Hampshire villages. Mrs. Brooks and Lucy waited at table, serving the two men first, and then sitting down to

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eat with them. Charterhouse was in good spirits and talked, with what for him was briskness, of the news in town. Muir, at first under some constraint from the strangeness of his situation, gradually felt himself at home in this atmosphere of unpretentious friendli-

On taking his place at table he had scarcely looked at Lucy Brooks, though he sat opposite to her. It was not until she was helping her mother to change the plates that he noticed her pretty figure—in a rose-colored blouse and gray cloth skirt—and her gracefully shaped head, with the mass of fair hair low on the neck.

"You're studying to teach, I think, Miss Brooks," Muir said, when she sat down again.

"I'm studying," the girl answered, with a light laugh; "whether it's to teach or not will depend on how I pass my examinations when the time comes."

She was piqued by Muir's lack of attention to her, and yet when he addressed her she blushed.

"Oh, you'll pass all right, if you work hard," Johnny Charterhouse said, encouragingly.

"Lucy's bright, but backward," Mrs. Brooks observed. "Mr. Charterhouse has helped her some—a good deal, I guess—but there's still lots for her to do."

"That's not very complimentary, ma," Lucy complained. "I'm no more backward than plenty of other girls I know. It's only that—that—"

"That what?" Muir smiled, sympathetically. "Tell us. I'm an old hand at teaching, you know."

"That I hate study," the girl burst out. "It's such drudgery."

"Of course," Muir agreed. "Everything worth

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doing involves drudgery; and teaching more than most things, perhaps."

"But I don't like doing what I can't do easily," Lucy rejoined. "That's why I hate Latin and algebra."

"There's a good deal of difference," Muir said, slowly, "between studying for one's own information only and studying in order to teach others. There are subjects, dry and uninteresting to one's own taste, that become quite absorbing when you know you're going into them for some one else."

"I'm afraid I'm not unselfish enough to feel that," Lucy sighed. "If a thing is dry, it's dry, and I might think about other people till I thought myself dazed and it wouldn't make any difference."

"That isn't just my point," Muir explained. "I mean that the very fact that you're trying to understand a subject for the sake of making it clear to others puts you unconsciously into sympathy with it and sends your mind off looking for the salient or essential points and the best way of explaining them."

"It wouldn't send mine," Lucy insisted. "I shouldn't like Latin any better if I had to teach a thousand children every day."

"What's the matter with it?" Muir laughed.

"The matter with it," the girl answered, "is that it's quite impossible. There never could have been people who dropped their words all about, anyhow, those that ought to come first in the middle, those that ought to be in the middle at the beginning, and the beginning itself nowhere. It's as if you threw the words of a sentence into the air and arranged them as they happened to come down."

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"How long have you been working at Latin?" Muir inquired.

"Two years," she answered, "and I'm not much further than where I began."

"Perhaps I could help you."

He spoke from habit—from sheer instinctive sympathy with the young thing floundering along the toilsome road to knowledge. If there was an upheaving of his heart in resuming the mission with which Heaven had sent him into the world he was not, for the moment, aware of it. He only hastened the end of supper with perceptible eagerness, and, while Lucy helped her mother to clear the table and get out her books, he busied himself in explaining the letters he had written for Johnny Charterhouse.

"You'll see," he told the boy, "that I've brought in all the terms we spoke of last night, and I want you to be especially careful with your past participles. By the time you've answered these I shall have finished with Miss Brooks. Then I'll come up."

So the evening passed even more quickly than the day. It was nearly ten when Lucy Brooks pushed away her Virgil and looked up smiling and triumphant. She felt that, after all, she knew more Latin than she had supposed. She had scanned and parsed and construed in such a way that Muir had kept saying, "Well done!" "That's good!" all the evening. When he said, "That's not quite right; where's your nominative?" it had required only the slightest steering on his part to enable her to go smoothly. For the first time in her life she had an inkling that the *Æneid* might be "real poetry," and the hexameter something more than an aimless collection of sounds. It

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was only on reflection that she grasped the fact that the quality, if not the quantity, of Muir's explanations was the cause of her sudden progress. She thanked him with pretty effusiveness that was all the more sincere from her contrition at having judged him harshly.

"Oh, I like doing it," Muir smiled, carelessly. "If it helps you, we can go on with it to-morrow night, and perhaps I could give you a lift with your algebra."

"I'm not so bad at that," the girl returned. "I hate it, though I can do it somehow. But my chum, Daisy Pine, is simply awful at it. The teacher just can't get it into her head. She lives next door."

"Then bring her in," Muir said, warmly, seizing the request in Lucy's intonation. "There's nothing stupider than algebra when it isn't clear to you, and I dare say I shall be able to help her."

To help! The word was coming frequently to Muir's lips. He used it several times again when he went up to work with Johnny Charterhouse. "I could help you in this. I could help you in that," he kept repeating, in approval of the boy's vaguely sketched plans of future study. He noticed the repetition himself later when he had returned to his own room and was thinking the evening over. The reflection made him smile grimly.

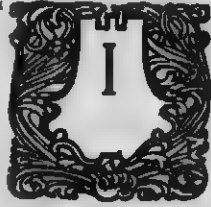
"'He saved others,'" he quoted, while he was undressing, "'himself he cannot save.' It is possible that I may be able to help these youngsters out of the waters whence I shall never emerge. I shall be like those old actors who can teach other men their parts, though they can never go on the stage again. Well, I dare say the work isn't wholly worthless. I wonder

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what Agatha would say to it? I wonder what she'd think if she knew I had passed the evening drilling a school-girl and an errand-boy in the elements? It isn't what we had planned for the end of November, but I've drawn the wine and I must drink it. My only hope now is in being no more of a coward than I can help. It is honor rooted in dishonor, but it is still honor of its kind."

So his thoughts wandered away from the simple events of the evening, and he went to bed still without seeing the significance to himself of what he had begun to do.

XIX

T'S simply shameful on Agatha's part," Persis said, indignantly. "She's making him feel that she's in love with him, and, worse than all, she's capable of marrying him." "And why shouldn't she marry him?" the professor asked.

"Because she doesn't care that about him," Persis answered, snapping her fingers into the air, with a wholly dramatic gesture.

She was sitting on a footstool beside her uncle's chair, in an attitude Mrs. Wollaston would have rebuked gently if she had been there to see. It was late in the afternoon, and the light outside had that golden quality peculiar to the season when the days are perceptibly growing long. It was only the end of March, but it had been a mild March; the grass and trees on the Common were already putting on the look of life that comes just before the actual spring, and Miss Blight had announced the passage of the earliest birds. It was not cold, but the professor loved his fire. He sat toasting his feet, with his big volume closed in his lap, while he listened to Persis pouring out her indignant heart. During the winter they had had many intimate talks, when Mrs. Wollaston was out of the way. The old man was awakening to the

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fact that his little Persis was no longer quite a child. Bit by bit he allowed her to creep into his confidence and suffered himself to be admitted into hers. There was a tacit understanding that the new relationship was entirely between themselves. Mrs. Wollaston was still strict as to the subjects on which Persis could speak or be spoken to, and neither had the courage to risk her disapproval. They excluded her, therefore, by a conspiracy of silence. When she was at the dressmaker's or at church Persis took advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to curl herself down beside her uncle's arm-chair and chatter without reserve. To the old man this semi-clandestine intimacy gave not only a sweetness to the day's routine, but a certain satisfaction in "scoring over Fanny."

"She doesn't care that for him," Persis repeated, "and she's making him think she does. If he were to propose to her I'm positive she'd take him."

"Well? As long as he cares enough for two—"

"Oh, but he doesn't," she said, quickly. "That's another thing they don't see, and it makes it worse. Paul has changed towards Agatha—ever since the trouble about poor Mr. Muir. Agatha doesn't know it, and Paul doesn't know it himself. Cousin Abby Leggett and Cousin Mary Dunster are so bound to bring the match about that they don't give either of them a chance to know their own minds. They all think Paul is crazy about her—"

"And how do you know he isn't?"

"I can tell," she cried, with strong emphasis on the last word. "I can tell by what he says to me about her. He admires her because she's got that air of race and distinction. Before she was engaged to Mr.

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Muir he was wild about her, and he thinks he is so still. He thinks he is because he thinks he ought to be, and so he thinks he must be; but I can see he isn't."

"You're uncommonly perspicacious."

"So I am," she said, complacently. "I can always see round a corner when other girls can't see straight before. I've watched Paul's mind change ever since the autumn, and I know Agatha isn't any longer the ideal to him that she used to be. Only the other day he and I were talking about Mr. Muir, and he said—and these were his very words, Uncle Hector—'If I were a woman,' he said, 'and I loved a man, I'll be hanged if I wouldn't stick to him whatever he did.' And he said this, too: he said, 'I don't believe a woman has it in her to love a man if she isn't ready to go under with him'; and I agree with him," the girl added, vehemently. "As I say, he admires her; but he has no sense of conviction for her any more than she has for him."

"I don't see what difference that makes so long as it would be a good match."

"Match!" Persis cried, scornfully. "I should think it would be a match—a regular shooting-match! Before they were married six months they'd be ready to kill each other. Those two are no more suited to live together than Catherine the Second and Napoleon the Great. It would be the old story of an invincible power coming in contact with an immovable substance. Agatha would have yielded to Mr. Muir—he had that careless air of strength that pleases her; but she'd want to break Paul Dunster on her wheel."

"Then why not let her?"

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"Because she couldn't; because Paul wouldn't be broken; because he'd insist on being master, as he ought to be. The only wife for Paul is the woman who'd put him first, who'd hold his opinions and consider his comfort and enter into his life and adapt herself to him in every way, as such a man has a right to expect. Agatha would want to drag him along in her train. He'd never be anything more to her than one of a dozen men—not if she married him ten times over. It would be wicked. He's too good to be treated like that, especially when he doesn't understand his own state of mind."

"Why don't you warn him?" the professor asked, dryly.

The girl laughed disdainfully.

"What has it to do with me? I don't care—except in a very general way. I hate to see people made unhappy, that's all. And I hate to see two old women like Cousin Abby Leggett and Cousin Mary Dunster—"

"Careful, careful," he interrupted. "Your aunt will be coming in soon."

"Well, she's not in now and I *will* say it. They've had experience enough to have a great deal more sense. They're old enough, goodness only knows. They want Paul and Agatha to be happy, but they want them to be happy in just their way and no other. It makes me perfectly furious. Agatha is only playing into their hand because she has nothing else to do. If any one were to come along who pleased her better she'd throw Paul Dunster aside with no more compunction than if he were a coat that didn't fit. I know her. Ever since Mr. Muir went

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she's been as devoid of conscience as she's been of heart. It's a curious thing that she should have turned out that way while he's been doing so much good—"

"Ah?" the old man interrupted. "What do you know about him?"

"I know a good deal," she answered, with a sudden change of tone.

"Ah?"

"I always meant to tell you," she continued, with some hesitation. "I know you and Aunt Fanny won't approve—"

"You may be sure we won't."

"But I've done it; and when Aunt Fanny finds it out she can just say what she likes and I'll bear it."

"That's kind of you. But what have you done?"

"I may as well tell you first as last."

"It seems to me you make it last."

"I've seen Mr. Muir. I've seen him on an average about once a week since Christmas."

"And you've deceived us?"

"I haven't meant to deceive you. I only didn't say anything about it. And I've done worse than that. You'd better know it all at once. I've taken Mrs. Brooks flowers to put in his room and books to lend him and jelly for his supper and—"

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! What a disgrace! The man will think you're making love to him."

"He doesn't think anything about it, except that he knows I go back and forward to the house."

"The house! What house?"

"Mrs. Brooks's. It's in Roxbury. I'll tell you all about it. But, Uncle Hector, dear Uncle Hector,

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please don't tell Aunt Fanny—till—till—till there's a more convenient opportunity. She'd stop me from going—"

"And so shall I, miss."

"Yes, but I could disobey you—that is, if I told you about it afterwards; whereas, I couldn't disobey her. You see, it was this way. It was an accident. One day last autumn, not long after the trouble, I was talking to Paul about Mr. Muir and that poor young Charterhouse and clothes and one thing and another, and Paul said there was a very good dress-maker over in Roxbury—in Greenland Park—and not dear."

"Well?"

"Well, I went to see her, and she made me this." She held up a bit of her skirt for illustration.

"Is that all?"

"No; she made me the tailor suit you liked and—"

"I don't care what she made you. Tell me what happened."

"Nothing happened; only one day, when I'd gone to be fitted, I saw Mr. Muir just by chance."

"What sort of chance? You knew he lived there, I suppose?"

"Yes; because Mrs. Brooks talked about him all the time, and Paul had given me one or two new books on English subjects that he thought he'd like to see. Mrs. Brooks was to lend them casually to Mr. Charterhouse. I had nothing to do with it at all. They only thought that through Mr. Charterhouse—"

"The books would filter along to Muir. I should think Dunster would be ashamed of himself."

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"Oh, so he is! That is," the girl corrected, "he has no sympathy with Mr. Muir. He doesn't like him. He only calls him 'poor devil,' and thinks he has tried his best to atone for what he did. And so he has, Uncle Hector. If you only knew the good he's doing!"

"Hmph! What sort of good?"

"Just the sort that you'd approve of."

"Don't drag me into it, miss. Tell me about it first."

"Well, you must know, Uncle Hector, that out in Roxbury there are a great many people of the very kind you'd like—"

"Leave me out, please."

"I mean," she pursued, "they're not poor and yet not rich. They earn good livings and are comfortable. But in nine cases out of ten, so Mrs. Brooks says, the boys and girls have to leave school just at the time when they're learning how to study. They get through the worst of the drudgery and reach the point where the mind begins to be formed—Mr. Muir told me this—and then it's all over. They've got to go into shops and offices and work."

"So they should."

"Yes; that's what they all say. But still there are always some who'd like to go on and study longer. Mrs. Brooks says it makes all the difference with what they can do in after-life. She says that many a man who could have made something of himself never gets further than the counter with fifteen dollars a week just because his training had to stop by the time he was seventeen. And, oh, Uncle Hector, you've no idea how bright and clever and in earnest lots of those

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young people out in Roxbury are! They're just as alive as they can be. I've mad friends with some of them—Lucy Brooks and Daisy Pine, for instance—and so I know. They dress well and talk well, and are interested in everything, from Eleanora Duse to the discovery of radium—just like you, Uncle Hector. Only their chance stops precisely when the mind is opening—that's what Mr. Muir says. They're trained just to the point where training begins to be worth while, and then it's all over and they lose the good of what's gone before. The boys go into offices and the girls do type-writing or keep books, and, little by little, Mr. Muir says, the mind closes again. Of course, lots of them don't care. But there are always some who wish they could have gone to Harvard or Radcliffe and prepared themselves for a step higher."

"But what's all this rigmarole got to do with the deceit you've practised on your poor aunt Fanny and me?"

"I should think it would excuse it, Uncle Hector—or some of it, at least. When I saw Mr. Muir giving himself up to help these young people just when they needed the kind of help that only a born teacher could give them, well—then—"

"Well—then—what? Go on."

"If you're going to be cross with me, I can't."

"I'm not cross; I'm only heart-broken, Persis, over your double conduct. We must keep it from your aunt, or I don't know what you'll get. Well, what happened next?"

"Nothing, only that I grew interested and I couldn't help admiring Mr. Muir. He's got fifteen or twenty of these young people around him, and you

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can't imagine the help he's giving them. There's that Mr. Charterhouse, for example. He was taken on by a place in Atlantic Avenue just as an errand boy, and now he's their foreign correspondent at ever so big a salary. Mr. Muir did that just by teaching him to write easily in commercial French. Mr. Charterhouse told me so. And there's Lucy Brooks and Daisy Pine, who are going to be school - teachers. Mr. Muir is coaching them, and they're simply crazy about their work and him. And there are ever so many others. Most of them had left school already, but now they are studying with him at nights; and I do think, Uncle Hector, that it's perfectly lovely."

"And so you've been taking him flowers and jelly?"

"I took them to Mrs. Brooks. Of course I knew he'd get the benefit of them, because he's her idol. And besides that—I might just as well tell you—"

"Just as well. Let me hear the worst."

"I've been reading German with Daisy Pine, and we've helped each other more than you can fancy. I've gone over there twice a week when you and Aunt Fanny have thought I was out with the girls."

"And you've seen Muir every time, I suppose?"

"No; only when he's come in to show Daisy and me what to do. German is the only thing I know well enough to help in, and it 'll give her a much better position if she knows it thoroughly."

"And what sort of a position do you think you've been getting for yourself, madam?"

"I suppose a pretty bad one. But I don't care, Uncle Hector. I wanted to do it, and Paul knew about it all the time. He's been ever so nice to Mr. Muir, in a way no one suspects. He wrote to the

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National people and told them about the work at Roxbury and got their sympathy, and they wrote to Mr. Muir asking for articles, and they've sent him books to review and a lot of things. That was his article on *The Ben Jonson Revival*, in the last number. And besides that, Blinn & Co.—"

"Pooh! Pooh! Blinn & Co.!"

"Yes, Blinn & Co., Uncle Hector, have given him some of their educational text-books to edit, and he's making a lot of money out of them."

"That's nothing but pickings. He's only to get ten per cent. on— But, tut, tut, I don't know anything about it."

He stopped abruptly, almost confusedly. Persis looked at him curiously in sudden silence.

"Uncle Hector," she said, at last, speaking slowly and in another tone, "do you know what I think?"

"No, my dear, and I don't want to know."

"I think," she went on, looking at him fixedly, "that Blinn & Co. gave him the work because you—"

He sprang to his feet with unusual agility, letting the big volume fall to the floor.

"Here's your aunt," he said, in a loud whisper of alarm. "She's at the door."

"But you won't tell her anything I've said," the girl pleaded, as she, too, rose.

"I'll spare her that. It would kill her."

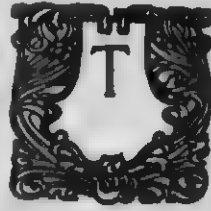
"And I can go on reading German with Daisy Pine?"

"No—no! Not unless you disobey me. Sh!"

"Sh—h!"

So they were both standing in silence when Mrs. Wollaston lilted in.

XX



HE next morning Persis was sent with a message to Agatha from Mr. Wollaston. She was to say that he was confined to the house with a cold, that in the afternoon Mrs. Wollaston would be at her Bee, that Persis would be "gadding" and he himself left alone; that any stray crumbs from the rich table of Miss Royal's society would, therefore, be thankfully accepted.

He was sitting by the fire, with a rug over his knees, when she arrived about four. He did not get up to greet her, but with his quick, shrewd gaze he inspected her as she came down the room towards him. It was the work of a second, but the result was the confirmation of what he had already observed. Agatha looked older—decidedly older. It was as if the light in a cloudless sky was no longer that of morning, but of early afternoon. Agatha was twenty-six, but she might have been taken for thirty. She had not lost what Persis called her "air of race" nor a shade of her distinction; but she was thinner, her expression colder, her general bearing prouder. In her carriage she was more self-possessed, more easy, more alert; what the professor missed in her was the old sympathy which had always put them in immediate touch with each other. In her smile there was affection, but

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the softness of other days was gone. In her grasp of the hand there was cordiality, but a cordiality from principle rather than the heart. In the slightly artificial, off-hand tone with which she said "How do you do?" he divined the woman for whom one person had become almost like another. He knew there was no special barrier between him and her; there was only a barrier between her and every one. He had seen her raise it. Ever since the day when she had swept out of that room, with Anthony Muir's confession branded on her heart, he had watched her build her defences against the world. With her humiliation she had retired behind them. She had tried not only to shut out sympathy, but to hide the very fact that she was suffering. She had wanted neither friend, confidant, nor counsellor. In her nature there were reserves of strength, and she had had nothing to do but tax them. She had done so with valiant recklessness, straining her nerves and breaking her heart with the indifference of one who would never again have use for either. She avoided the bravado of defiance as dexterously as she concealed the futility of grief. As nearly as might be she made Anthony Muir's standard of acting her own. She appeared simple and natural, with that perfection of bearing which hides effort. After a few days of decorous semi-seclusion she appeared one afternoon among some dozen or twenty people at Mrs. Arlington Revere's. Any one could see that she had passed through an unusual experience—she was paler, quieter, and more pensive. But that was all. If she did not talk gayly, at least she talked readily and without emotion. It was the very hour at which Anthony Muir was leav-

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ing Westmorland Hall and going out of the old life forever. From his condition of bitterness and loneliness he pictured hers. He would have been amazed, could the curtain of separation have been lifted, to have seen her sitting with teacup in hand, elegant, well poised, quietly listening to Miss Louisa Wimple's plans for her brother's sabbatical year abroad.

During the winter Agatha had imposed on nearly every one. She played her part so well as to be taken for a woman without heart. Cousin Abby Leggett was astonished at her iron nerve; Persis was puzzled by her lack of interest in the fate of Anthony Muir; Mrs. Wollaston was grieved by her want of sentiment. It was generally felt that she never could have loved Muir at all, otherwise she could not have carried herself so calmly. There was, however, one old man whose experience of the heroines of mediæval literature had taught him to read the signs of a woman's heart anywhere rather than in what meets the eye. To Agatha's greeting now he responded querulously.

"How do I do? What's that to you? I might be *in extremis* and you wouldn't tap at the door to inquire. How long is it since you've been here?"

"Oh, don't ask me," she cried, sinking into an arm-chair, where she sat with her hands in her muff. In her close-fitting velvet, her small spring sables and long-plumed hat she had an air of well-appointed self-sufficiency, equal to any future assaults of fate. "Don't ask me," she repeated. "I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself. The fact is, I'm so busy. I've dined out three times this week already, and to-night

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I'm going to the theatre. But if I'd known you wanted to see me—"

"I didn't—at least, not till now. My first intention was not to see you even if you came; but on second thoughts it seemed to me better to have it out with you rather than to go on cherishing ill-feeling. Fanny will feel pretty badly when she hears of it."

"Hears of what, Mr. Wollaston? I don't think I know what you mean."

"Well, I'll tell you. It doesn't seem right to me that I should be left to learn by the merest chance—by the tongue of gossip, I might say—that a girl whom I've brought up, so to speak, is going to be married—"

"Oh, but I'm not—not yet," Agatha cried, startled into half-revealing her intentions.

"What do you mean by *yet*? If you're not married yet, yet you are engaged, I suppose?"

"No, no. I assure you—"

"You're not engaged to Paul Dunster?"

"No, Mr. Wollaston; no, no. I assure you—"

"You needn't assure me. If you're not you ought to be. I hear you're crazy about him."

"That's putting it rather strongly," she protested, with a smile.

"And I hoped you were. So did Fanny. She'll be as disappointed as I am to hear it isn't settled. How it does hang fire, to be sure! In my time it would have been done long ago, and you'd have been keeping house by now."

The smile faded partially from Agatha's lips and her brow contracted into an expression of perplexity.

"But, Mr. Wollaston," she began, her eyes fixed

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on a bunch of roses in the old-fashioned carpet, "would you advise me—would you really advise me—"

"Advise you!" the old man cried, starting forward in his chair. "My dear, we're praying for it. There's Fanny and Abby Leggett and Mary Dunster and the Lord knows how many more old women in the family have been down on their bended knees about it for the last three years. You've got to do it now, if it's only for the sake of keeping up their faith in the efficacy of intercession."

"Yes, but *you*—" she began again.

"Me! My dear, any one with half an eye can see that Paul Dunster was sent into this world on purpose to be your husband. He's your born affinity. If ever there was a case of a marriage made in heaven it's that one. You can see now why we were so upset when you were engaged to Muir."

"Oh, please," she cried, with a sudden start, as if he had touched a wound.

"Well, I won't, if you don't like to talk about it. But still I don't see why we shouldn't—just you and I, you know. But to come back to Paul Dunster. I can see you married now. I can see how happy you'd be. Why, you're cut out to be the wife for him. It isn't every one would do for Paul. It isn't every one who'd be adaptable enough."

"Oh, as for that," she laughed, nervously, "I'm not sure—"

"Where he'd find any one equal to you," the old man dashed in. "That's what I say. That's what Fanny says. Any one can see that you're as adaptable as a willow wand. That's just where you'd suit Paul."

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He's one of those square-cut, wooden-natured chaps that are exactly thus and so and can't be any other way. You can no more expect to mould him by influence than you can hope to touch the heart of a stone god by prayer. But you wouldn't want to do that. You know Paul just as well as we do. Once you'd taken him as your master you'd submit to him as your master—"

"Oh, but Mr. Wollaston," she ventured, "do you think that in marriage there should be any question of submission on the one side or—?"

"I'm not talking of marriage in general, but of your marriage to Paul. Marriage in general may be one thing, but marriage in particular is pretty sure to be another. And what Paul wants is a wife who'd accept his opinions as you would, who'd adopt his habits as you would, who'd make his comfort the first object of her life and take his wish as her law. That's the sort of wife for Paul, and we've all picked you out for it. He'd be crazy if he had any other kind—he's so dogged and pugnacious and unmalleable. I don't know anybody but you who could fill the position, and when I say so I'm paying you a very high compliment."

"Thank you," she said, dryly, still looking down at the roses. The smile, which had never quite left her lips, quivered as if uncertain whether to dissolve into tears or laughter.

"I can see it. I can see it," he went on, enthusiastically. "You'd be done with all this going to theatres and out to dine. Paul wouldn't like that at all. It isn't his style. You'd entertain the freshmen in batches every autumn, if he's appointed to look

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after them, as I suppose he'll be. You'd nurse them out of their callowness and turn them loose upon the world. After that your mere social life would be at an end. Paul wouldn't want you to waste your time on it. Your existence would become as placid as if you were locked in a box. You'd read with him and work with him and copy for him, perhaps, and make yourself useful in a way you wouldn't get a chance of doing with nine husbands out of ten. Paul would expect it of you, and you'd be proud to do it. Lord, if I'd had a wife like that! If I were you I'm not sure that I shouldn't take a course in stenography or typewriting and begin at once. It would be of the greatest help in the world to Paul, and would give you something to fill up your time."

He stopped to cough, and she took advantage of the opportunity to speak.

"But wouldn't it be rather soon to begin such active preparations when he hasn't asked me to marry him yet?"

"Oh, that's nothing!" he returned, when he had found his voice again. "Fanny had our house furnished—in her mind's eye, that is—and had begun giving dinner-parties long before I proposed to her. When you know a thing is sure, it's as good as done."

"But I don't know that it is sure."

"In any case you can be getting yourself ready. There's no harm in that. You can be thinking it over and studying his tastes beforehand and trying your best to please him, so that when the time comes he may have as little fault to find as possible. You're a sensible girl, Agatha. I've always said that of you; and I can't tell you how much I've admired the way

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you carried yourself in the affair with poor young Muir. Tut, tut!" he exclaimed, as she started again with a quick catch in her breath as if of sudden pain. "I'm not going to talk about it. I'm only going to say how much I admired you. I've been proud of you. Everybody has seen that you're not a girl with whom mere sentiment counts for much. It's been splendid. Now some women would have had the foolish idea of sticking to a fallen man just out of loyalty. As if loyalty was any good in a case like that. I believe that if the thing had happened to me—and there was no reason why it shouldn't have happened to me, for, the Lord knows, I confiscated enough of other men's ideas in my earlier books—but if the thing had happened to me I believe Fanny would have stuck to me to the bitter end. And it wouldn't have done me any good—except in the way of consolation. But what's consolation to a ruined man? Besides, a fellow doesn't deserve consolation when he's done what Muir did. Now, keep quiet—keep quiet. I'm not going to say a word about him. And if I did, what harm? Haven't I been like a father to you? Is there anybody who has a better right to speak to you than I? Tell me that, now."

She shook her head, but did not raise her eyes. The smile had wholly faded, and she bit her lip in the effort to maintain her self-control.

"I'm not going to talk about Muir," he went on. "I don't want to. I've heard things about him that show how right you were to act just as you did."

"Mr. Wollaston please!" she implored, lifting her eyes to him, beseechingly.

"There, there, my dear. It's all over. That's the

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last thing I shall say about him. As if it wasn't weakness enough for a young man to confess his crime and expiate it—when, I dare say, there wouldn't have been any need of his doing it—he's gone down further than I could have supposed. I'll not tell you about it, because it would only make your heart ache."

In spite of herself she could not keep out of her eyes and features an expression of silent questioning.

"There was a boy in college last year," the old man pursued—"a very bad boy. He'd stolen money and had to leave. Muir was his adviser and brought him to atonement. That man seems to have had atonement on the brain. Well, we got the boy off without the imprisonment he deserved. He disappeared. Shortly after that he gets a job as errand-boy in Atlantic Avenue. What do you think our Mr. Muir does, the minute he leaves Harvard himself? Well, I'd better not tell you. Better throw over the whole business the cloak of charity."

"You can tell me—now," Agatha gasped.

"Mr. Muir, if you'll believe it, goes straight to that wicked boy, associates with him, lives in the same house with him, teaches him French and Heaven only knows what else, and enables this fellow—who'd already stolen money, mind you—to pick up again and get a better position. So to-day there's my lord boy, with something like thirty dollars a week, holding his head up and smoking his cigarettes at ten cents a bunch, just as if he had graduated *cum laude*, like you or me. What do you think of that, now?"

"If the boy was sorry—and was worthy—" she began to stammer.

"That's neither here nor there. The point is in

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the extent to which Muir has lowered his own dignity."

"I don't quite see that," she said, with difficulty. "If the boy was worth saving it seems to me it might have been a fine thing—"

"Oh, but he's done worse than that," the professor exclaimed, in a large tone. "You have no ideal! You ought to hear Persis talk about him. There never was any one so right as you were. The man seems to have forgotten himself entirely. You'd hardly believe it. He hasn't made the least attempt to rehabilitate himself. On the contrary, he lives in the most modest way—a humble way, you might even say—and what do you think he does?"

Again Agatha could only look her unspoken interrogation.

"He — coaches — young — people — for — nothing," he said, with slow emphasis, marking off each word by a tap on the arm of his chair. "He's got round him a lot of lads and girls of quite—quite—what shall I say?—quite modest, not to say subordinate station in life—and he makes them study with him. Can you think of it? The brilliant Anthony Muir!—now debasing his intellect to the service of quite—quite—simple people, and doing it for nothing!"

"I don't know that I should call it debasing," she said, thoughtfully.

"What other word would you apply?"

"And—and—I suppose he does something for a living?"

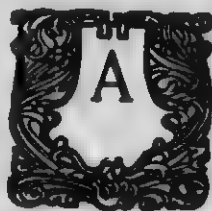
In spite of all her efforts she could not stifle her interest, now that she had begun to speak of him.

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"I believe," the professor said, indifferently—"I believe he has some small means—a mere trifle. Besides that, Blinn & Co. have been giving him some of their text-books to edit. I don't know how they could have been so weak, but they've done it. I believe it brings him in something. Then he writes for the *National*. I forgot to tell you that. The editor sent him a perfectly ridiculous letter, I believe; told him he had done his best to expiate, and so forth and so forth—you know the sort of thing—and asked him to contribute. That very article you were admiring so the last time you were here, on *The Ben Jonson Revival*, was written by nobody less than Anthony Muir himself."

The professor paused and Agatha made no response. There was a long silence, which the old man broke by inquiring after Abby Leggett's sciatica. On the subjects they had been discussing he thought he had said enough for one time. Perhaps Agatha thought so, too; for when, a little later, she rose to go away she no longer had that air of perfect self-command which had been so marked when she came in.

XXI



AS Agatha walked homeward, one of the professor's sentences remained especially in her mind. "You ought to hear Persis talk about him." Then Persis knew what she did not know. Her first feeling was that Persis had taken a liberty. What right had she to follow Anthony Muir into the darkness whither he had retreated? Why track him down, and then speak ill of him? Why not let his fate remain a mystery like that of Louis XVII.? Surely, if it belonged to any one to pursue him with either interest or ill-will, it belonged to her, Agatha Royal, who had been so cruelly humiliated and wronged. If she could let him be, Persis might well do the same. But it was not like Persis, she reflected further, to be vindictive. There was probably some other motive, which she did not know. Well, it made no difference. It was nothing to her. She would not think about it any more. It was the plan she had followed during the last two or three months, and she had acquired a wonderful command over her thoughts. At first her mind could dwell on nothing but him. Sleeping or waking, alone or in society, he had been present to her mental vision. She had banished him by sheer force of will. She knew he was not gone, but at

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least he was farther off. She knew her love was not dead, but at least it was dulled as by a narcotic. She had conquered it; it had not conquered her; "and if," she reasoned—"if I have done so much in five months, what may I not do in ten and twenty and forty and in the years that lie before me? A time will come when I shall be free from this unworthy obsession and the name of Anthony Muir will stir me only as the wind stirs last year's leaves."

She commended herself for her strength of character. It was not every woman, she was sure, who, out of the depths of suffering, could look forward to winning such a victory over pain. It was not easy even for her, but she could do it. She could bear what was to be borne for the moment, in the certainty that time and a fuller realization of Anthony Muir's baseness would give her peace.

And how base he had been! It made her flush to think that any one whom she had allowed to come so near could have lied to her. He had lied to her, looking her straight in the eyes, and knowing that she would take his word against that of the whole world. If it had been anything but lying! She could have forgiven a more gross, a mere sensual offence; but that deflection of the moral nature which makes it possible for a man to lie she could not forgive. There was but one thing for which she respected him; in his confession he had made no excuses nor asked for pardon. He had dropped like a bullet in the sea and gone out of sight. That was well done, and for her the only course was to sail on and forget him.

No, she could not forget him; of course not. She realized that now, as she walked home from Mr.

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Wollaston's. It was useless to try. It would be unnatural to succeed. What she could do was to remember with indifference—with that interested indifference which we give to those with whom we have once been intimate and for whom we care no longer. We like to hear about them, and to know what new developments have come into their lives; but they do not affect us any more. She was wrong, perhaps, to shrink from hearing his name; she was wrong to be unwilling to learn what he was doing. If in the deeps into which he had gone down he was not wholly lost, she had magnanimity enough to be glad—glad, that is, with the mingling of pity and disdain we feel for those who have injured us, but whom we are too generous to strike.

As for herself, she would marry Paul Dunster. He loved her, and she respected him. These reasons were perhaps not strong enough if there were no others; but there were others. The marriage would please every one who cared for her and for whom she cared. They had all been so good to her!—Mr. and Mrs. Wollaston and Cousin Abby and Mary Dunster and all the rest of their little circle. She would marry Paul for their sakes. For their sakes, too, she would try to humble herself and make him just such a wife as Mr. Wollaston described. She knew she could do it if she tried; and perhaps, after all, Paul might not be so inflexible in marriage as he seemed in friendship. She would do it, in any case. She had no one to think of but the dear friends around, who had loved her all her life. She might as well sacrifice herself for them as for others. Paul loved her, at least; and in the spiritual fatigue of the effort she was making to mas-

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ter herself it seemed good to creep into any kind of haven where there was a chance of rest.

She was unusually gracious to him, therefore, when they met in the lobby of the theatre that evening. It was true that he seemed shorter than ever between two tall women like Cousin Abby and herself; but she knew wives who were taller than their husbands and who were, nevertheless, quite satisfied with their lots. It was the same with the cast in his eye—one got used to it and liked him the better for having it. These were trifles, she said, that should never disturb a woman who could see the serious side of things. Between the acts she had further reason to think they might have exaggerated the severity of his temperament. He was actually more merciful than she in his judgment on Mrs. Dane and her defence. Ordinarily it was the reverse when moral problems came up for discussion between them. It was not the moment to go into the subject then; so she said, "We must have that out another time."

He drove home with them from the play and wished them good-night at the door.

"When are we to see you again?" Miss Leggett inquired, as he was going. She had observed a certain change in Agatha's manner towards him, and she was too much his partisan not to follow the advantage up.

"Why can't you come and lunch with us to-morrow?" Agatha asked; "and afterwards we could all go together to see the exhibition of Shannon portraits."

"I can," he answered. "I've no lectures at all to-morrow afternoon."

"He means it this time," Miss Leggett said to her-

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self, "and I do believe she means it, too. It will be now or never."

When, therefore, she saw next morning that Agatha was going to wear her hat at luncheon she quietly took her own bonnet off again. It gave her the opportunity of saying, when the coffee was being passed, "None for me, thanks. I'll just run up and get ready while you're having yours."

It was not the conventional setting for a matrimonial proposal; but with the modern tendency to do things in original and characteristic ways it was, perhaps, none the worse on that account. Agatha sat at the head of the table, stirring her coffee, quite at her ease. Dunster, equally at his ease, sat at the side and lit his cigarette. The maid in her neat black gown and white apron placed the *fine Champagne* beside him and slipped from the room. The spring sunshine gleamed richly on the mahogany surfaces of the highly polished Chippendale—some of it original, an inheritance from Agatha's great-grandfather, and the rest of it carefully reproduced. Outside, in the garden, there were catkins on the willows and crocuses in the grass, and a general sense of man and nature making new and delightful plans.

"If you can excuse Mrs. Dane's prevarication," Agatha said, continuing the discussion of last night's play, "I should think you could produce equally strong arguments in favor of Mr. Muir's."

She brought out the name boldly. She did so with deliberate forethought; for there were certain subjects that must be faced before she could give an affirmative answer to the question which, she was sure, was hovering on Paul's lips. Dunster himself showed

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no surprise. He had been warned some time ago by Persis that Agatha might, one day, like to talk to him about Muir. "She'll have to speak of him sooner or later," Persis had reasoned. "She wouldn't be a woman if she didn't. If so, it will probably be to you or me; and if it's to you, you mustn't put on airs of solemnity or make her think it's a painful topic. You must answer just as casually as if she were speaking of Cousin Abby or Cousin Mary." Startled though he was, Dunster did his best to follow those instructions now.

"I don't excuse Mrs. Dane," he said, as calmly as he could. "I say only that I've a lot of sympathy for any poor wretch entangled in a net which is partly woven by himself and partly flung around him by the Fates."

"You say that, probably, because Mrs. Dane was a woman. If it were a man who had—"

"I should feel the same. In any such system of lying it's often difficult to determine how much is moral obliquity and how much the mere splashing of the drowning creature to save itself. Persis thinks that when we see a fellow-creature sinking—from whatever cause—we should run to him with a rope. I'm not sure that I go as far as that myself, but at least I'd like to refrain from throwing stones at him while he's going down."

"Isn't that something new with you?"

"I don't know whether it's new or only undiscovered. Persis thinks it's the latter. She says I'm like an apple—sour in the early stages, but capable of mellowing tendencies as time goes on."

"That's rather a fine trait of character," Agatha

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said, pensively. She knew that by following this vein and making him talk of himself she could bring him to his offer. But she was not ready for it. Before she could listen to it there must be no reserve between them as to her own attitude towards Muir.

"Do you think," she asked, with an effort to keep the conversation to its original theme, "that we have anything to do with the motives of other people's wrong-doing? Could we ever, with out limited knowledge, disentangle the excusable from the inexcusable with anything like justice?"

"I suppose we couldn't, but we could try."

"The law doesn't try. The law establishes a fact and acquits or condemns a man accordingly. Temptation and temperament are both outside its scope."

"The law is a great, unemotional spirit, dealing with us in general. We, on the contrary, are very emotional flesh, dealing with each other in particular. I think the least we can do is to aim at some sympathetic understanding of why the people we know go wrong—I mean the people we know well or are fond of—the people towards whom we've got to take an attitude of approval or blame."

"But wouldn't that tend to take the backbone out of our own sense of rectitude?"

"I don't think so. If you're an observer of human nature, you can't fail to have noticed that it isn't the sinner who has compassion on the sinner, it's the saint. It isn't the man without sin who is eager to cast the first stone, it's always the one who can be easily convicted by his own conscience."

"That sounds rather odd, coming from you."

"Oh, I!" he laughed. "I'm just beginning to learn

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that it's the man who beats his breast and doesn't dare to lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven who goes down to his house justified, rather than he who fasts twice in the week and gives tithes of all that he possesses. It seems an obvious moral to draw, and yet, I'm afraid, I'm only beginning to take it in."

Agatha was not sure of what he meant, but she thought it a good opportunity to bring Muir's name more plainly under discussion.

"Do I understand," she asked, "that you would make excuses for people like Mrs. Dane and—and Mr. Muir?"

"I think," he said, balancing his spoon on the edge of his coffee-cup and looking at it critically with his head on one side—"I think I could best explain what I mean if I told you something. It's something which I feel you ought to know. It isn't to my credit, but if—"

He broke off suddenly. He was going to say, "if we are going to be nearer to each other," but he realized in time that there was no assurance of that as yet.

"It's something you ought to know," he repeated, "and it will be a relief to my mind to tell you. I played a certain part in Muir's trouble, and I'm sorry for it. I've learned from it how much I'm morally inferior, in many ways, to Muir himself."

"Oh, but, Paul!" she protested.

"Muir and I," he pursued, "are of about the same age. We were at the same school, we were in the same class in college, we took the same courses, and we adopted the same careers. But Muir was always ahead of me. I believed I had better qualities than

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he, but he always won. Two years ago he was appointed assistant-professor while I was left an instructor. Our books were published about the same time, and his leaped into success while mine fell dead from the press. You promised to marry him, while I—"

Again he stopped. "While I, who loved you," were the words on his tongue, but it was not the moment to utter them. Agatha expected them and waited.

"I hated Muir," he went on again. "I thought I hated him from natural antipathy; but, since I've come to analyze my own motives, I've found that I hated him from sheer impotent jealousy of a success which I couldn't achieve."

"Paul, I don't think you ought to say this," she said, with an air of distress.

"On the contrary," he returned, calmly. "You, of all people, ought to know me as I am. Well, it was just at the time of your engagement to Muir that I got possession of his secret. I'd had Christopher Love's old book among a lot of rubbish on my shelves for years past. I can't remember how it ever came into my possession. I dipped into it one day by accident, and then I saw that Muir had been using it. I decided then and there to break his career. In doing so I ascribed to myself all the high moral principles for which, I think, you and most of my friends give me credit. In reality I was doing it from the smallest promptings of meanness and revenge. On the very night when we all dined together at the Wollastons', and your engagement was announced, I attacked Muir at the table. You ought to remember

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it. I was almost insane from the desire to degrade him in everybody's eyes. Later I made away with the book lest it should fall into your hands and give you needless pain; but I knew already, in my secret heart, that Love, of Detroit, would never give up till Muir was ruined."

"I don't see why you're telling me this. I wish you wouldn't, Paul."

"I'm telling you," he replied, "largely by way of illustration. I want to point out that if I'd understood my own moral state I shouldn't have been so ready to heap contempt on Muir's. I should have had sympathy with him, perhaps even I should have stood by him—"

"Oh!"

"Yes, I'm hanged if I shouldn't! The fellow showed greater pluck than any of us. When I knew that he'd laid his soul bare before the world, I began to see that he had displayed a courage I should never have been equal to. And, little by little, through the winter, I've felt it more. I've come to see that I've fallen short in a great emergency—"

"Oh, but, in saying that you blame me," she broke in, hurriedly.

"I'm not speaking of any one but myself."

"But do you blame me?" she insisted.

"Blame you—how?"

"In the—the—emergency of which you speak, do you think I fell short?"

A change had come into her manner, and she spoke with painful eagerness.

"I'm not passing judgment on any one but myself."

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"Then I'll put it differently. Do you think that a woman placed as I was placed could have acted otherwise than as I acted?"

He looked at her silently and there was a long pause.

"I don't see why I should answer that," he said, at last.

"But I insist, Paul. It's of the greatest consequence to us both for me to know."

Again there was a pause.

"If you insist," he said, finally, with characteristic bluntness, "I think she could have acted otherwise."

"What sort of woman? A stronger woman? A better woman? A more loyal woman? What sort of woman do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm not prepared to say. I suppose, a woman who thought more about the man she—she loved than about herself."

"Would any woman ever have done it?" she cried, eager to justify herself.

"I think I know one who would," he answered, quietly.

"Who?" The word came out half imperiously, half incredulously.

"Persis Wollaston."

She leaned back in her chair and uttered a little, scornful laugh.

"You're mistaken, Paul. Persis is one of the most bitter against him."

"I'm sure you're wrong."

"Mr. Wollaston himself told me so."

"Then you must have misunderstood him. Persis has never deserted Muir since the hour of his down-

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fall. She's done more to keep him sane than all the rest of his former friends put together. You've no conception of what a splendid, faithful, noble creature she is. You think her light-minded, perhaps, but she has an immense amount of real seriousness in her little head. She's one of the sweetest creatures God ever made," he went on, breathlessly. "You don't know what she's been to Muir this winter. She has not only kept his heart from breaking, she has saved him from blowing out his brains. She's given him something to hold by and believe in. You can take my word for it; if he's beginning to climb up out of the depths again it's by the grasp of her steady, loyal little hand. It's the same with me. It's in seeing what she is that I've come to see what I am. It's in watching her sympathy for a ruined man that I've realized my own hypocritical vindictiveness. Agatha, I wish you knew her as she is. I'm sure you'd want to worship the very ground she—"

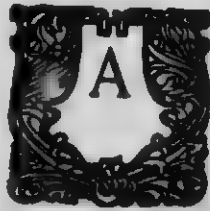
Dunster stopped, startled by the flow of his own eloquence. He wondered what he had been saying, and how he would ever get back to the proposal that had been so often on his tongue. Agatha looked at him curiously, a new idea beginning to shape itself in her mind. It was so strange, so contrary to all that she had taken for granted hitherto, that it seemed as if the world had suddenly begun to go round with a reversed motion. The silence was awkward, and her mind groped confusedly for something to say. Before she had found it there was a loud, significant cough at the door. There followed a few seconds' grace before Cousin Abby turned the knob and came in very slowly.

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"Well?" she demanded, in her lordly tone.

"Well, we're ready," Agatha said, lamely, while she and Dunster rose.

As Miss Leggett had committed herself to the belief that it was to be "now or never," it was not strange that she should have been out of temper during the rest of the afternoon.



GATHA paid little attention to the Shannon portraits that afternoon. As she moved from one fair face to another, making hap-hazard comments, her mind was busily occupied in the effort to penetrate the mist of ideas gathering round her. Where she had thought the path of duty lay clear before her it seemed to lose itself suddenly in fog. What did Paul mean? Did he love her? Did he even respect her? Was he going, after all, to ask her to marry him? She had considered herself so long the perfect woman in his eyes that it caused her a strange discomfort to think otherwise. His had been the doglike fidelity on which a woman who has suffered likes to fall back when other supports have failed her. She had never supposed for a moment that when she turned to it, it would not be there. She had never dreamed that he could criticise her or take his absolute approval back. She had counted so much on his devotion that she had hardly given it its proper value. To have to think now that she had been mistaken put all her mental processes out of joint.

With regard to Muir she was even more bewildered. It had never occurred to her that she could have adopted any other line than that which she had fol-

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lowed. He had avowed himself unworthy of her, and there had seemed but one thing for her to do. To do it, she had beaten back her own heart until it seemed to lie bruised and insensible within her. And now was she to question her own heroism and wonder if, after all, she had not been wrong? A woman, so Paul Dunster said, who thought less of herself than of the man she loved might have acted differently. He had gone further and singled out Persis Wollaston as one who could have done so. Persis had never deserted Anthony Muir since the hour of his downfall. She had done more than any one to keep him sane. She had not only saved him from breaking his heart, but from blowing his brains out. If he was climbing up out of the depths again it was by the grasp of her loyal little hand. Agatha turned these words over in her mind and admitted to herself that she did not like them. She had an unreasonable feeling that every one was against her. They had kept in touch with Anthony Muir and done good by stealth and shut her out of a share in it. A share! She should have had all of it. Why had they not told her that there was anything to be done? As it was, he might rise from his ruin, like Lazarus from the grave, and owe nothing whatever to her. She had never contemplated the possibility of his being saved, and, now that the chance of it loomed up before her, it was a scorching thought that the instrument of his salvation should be any other woman than herself.

She knew she was very unhappy, and, as she was reaching the limits of her self-control, she allowed herself to be irritable. She stood admiring the portrait of Lady Dempster, and yet when Cousin Abby came

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up and admired it, too, she declared that she thought it hideous. She couldn't see how any one with taste could find it otherwise. Cousin Abby called on Dunster to endorse her opinion. Dunster, who had seemed to be in the clouds ever since luncheon, confessed himself no judge of pictures. "What on earth is the use of people coming to see a collection of portraits if they can't judge of pictures?" Agatha asked, and moved on to another. Dunster and Miss Leggett exchanged glances and followed.

"It's your fault," Cousin Abby whispered.

"Why? I haven't done anything," he protested.

"That's just it. I've no patience with you," she retorted, raising her nose with Juno-like scorn.

Dunster put them into the carriage and they drove home in silence. Later they dined in silence. Agatha thus had time to think. Her irritation passed and her sense of justice returned. She acquitted Paul and Cousin Abby of any deliberate intention to injure her, and she admitted that even Persis might not have been aware that she was "doing any harm." After dinner she did not take her work, but roamed restlessly about the house. It was already late when she came into the library where Miss Leggett, deep in her arm-chair, was gleaning the last morsels of information from the evening paper.

Agatha sat down at the large central table, slightly behind Miss Leggett and in a position where she could not easily be seen. She was still meditating; and though she began arranging the various small objects before her, it was from that instinctive use of the hands which often helps to concentrate the thoughts.

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' Cousin Abby," she said, at last, "do you know what Paul thinks?"

"Something stupid, I dare say," Miss Leggett answered, without looking up from her paper. "I believe that boy would let the world drop from under his feet if the law of gravitation didn't keep him on it."

"He thinks," Agatha went on, slowly, ignoring the inner meaning of the last remark—"he thinks that I might have acted otherwise last autumn."

"Last—when?" Miss Leggett cried, sharply, wheeling round in her chair.

"Last autumn—about Mr. Muir," Agatha explained, a deep color stealing into her cheek. "He thinks that if I'd stood by him—"

"Oh, but, my dear, only a very superior woman could have done that." Agatha winced, and Miss Leggett saw her mistake. "Not that you wouldn't be equal to anything," she corrected, "only—only, it doesn't seem quite your style."

"You mean that it isn't my style to be loyal."

"No, I don't."

"Yes, you do, Cousin Abby. You think I've only got it in me to be a fair-weather friend."

"For mercy's sake, why are you bringing this up now?" Miss Leggett asked, in not unreasonable astonishment. "Surely you're not thinking—"

"No," Agatha broke in, hastily, "I'm not thinking of anything. I'm just wondering. Naturally, I can't help asking myself sometimes if I did quite right."

"You did what you were quite justified in doing."

"But is it enough to be only justified? Mayn't there be something more?"

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"My dear, you might as well ask if it's enough only to get into heaven. No doubt there may be something more, but that's very good as it is."

"But you said yourself that a very superior woman—"

"Oh, well, I meant a woman who has nothing else to do but be superior. Don't take offence at that. You're superior enough, Heaven only knows. I don't know how we should live with you if you were any more so."

"Still, you meant—"

"Now, don't go telling me what I meant. You'll allow me to know that better than you."

"You meant," Agatha persisted, "that a woman of higher type than I would have forgotten herself for the sake of the man whose life she had promised to share, whatever it might turn out to be."

"If I meant anything at all," Cousin Abby said, impatiently, "I meant a woman like Hester Symes, who married that dreadful bank president—Cox, I think his name was. She was engaged to him before the thing happened, and she waited till he came out of prison. Then she married him."

"And did she—help him?"

"Of course she helped him. All the good that ever came to him after that he owed to her. But, my dear, she wasn't a bit like you. She was a plain girl, with no style, and hardly ever asked anywhere."

"Still, she did it."

"Oh yes, she did it, and everybody respected her for it; but, as I say, she had nothing else to do. It's different with you, who have so much to keep up for."

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"But couldn't I keep up and do that, too?"

"No, you couldn't; and you'd better be quite clear about it. When a woman does what Hester Symes did, she's got to choose between staying up and going down."

"Why?" Agatha asked, blankly.

"From the very nature of the case. When a man has lost his footing, so to speak, no woman can restore him. She can go to him and share his fall; she can never bring him to share hers."

"I don't see that—" Agatha began to argue.

"You'd see it if you tried it," Cousin Abner retorted. "It isn't possible that it should be otherwise. Everybody respected Hester Symes, as I'm sure, but they didn't ask him and her to dinner. They didn't ask them to anything. They just respected her and let them be."

"Does that seem right?" Agatha asked, with a touch of indignation.

"It mayn't be right in strict evangelical theory, but it's right enough in ordinary mundane practice. What else could even their best friends do? Nobody could forget that he'd speculated with a bank's money and ruined ever so many people. Of course they couldn't. He might have been the most penitent sinner ever pardoned, and yet public opinion wouldn't and couldn't treat him as if he hadn't sinned at all. It was perfectly splendid of Hester Symes, but when she took him she had to choose between the rest of the world and him. I don't mean to say she didn't do him a lot of good, but it wasn't in her power to bring him back to the life he'd led before. What she did was to comfort him and strengthen him and give

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him back something of the self-confidence of a man after having been a convict. She went down the steps of honor in order to help him up again; but even so, she could never, never drag him to the top."

"That seems hard," Agatha said, with a catch in her voice.

"I don't believe she found it so," Cousin Abby went on. "You see, they became all in all to each other. I believe she loved him the more for the sacrifice he cost her."

"Could that happen?"

"With a woman like Hester Symes it could."

"But not with a woman like me. I think you're rather pitiless, Cousin Abby."

"We're not talking about you, my dear—at least, I'm not. It's too late for you to think about such a thing—that is, if you are thinking about it."

"Too late? Why is it too late?" Agatha raised her head, with a look in which there was both defiance and alarm.

Cousin Abby shrugged her shoulders, and her expression seemed to say, "You ought to know that as well as I."

"Why is it too late?" Agatha asked again.

"Because," Miss Leggett explained, looking vaguely off into the shadows of the room—"because that sort of generosity must show itself at once or not at all. No man with any pride could accept the loyalty that comes halting along six months behind-hand."

"Oh, don't!" Agatha pleaded.

"It's true, my dear. A woman who makes such a sacrifice as that mustn't have any doubt about it."

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She must know from the very first instant that she has it in her to do it."

"But I didn't know it was to be done," Agatha cried, in a quavering tone, suggestive of tears. "I didn't know women ever did such things. I thought I had to give him up in order to keep my self-respect. I could have gone down the steps of honor, too, only I didn't know there was a way."

"And, I dare say, it's all the better for you that you didn't," Cousin Abby said, consolingly. "You might have done something rash and been sorry for it. If you'd said on the spur of the moment that you'd be true to him, it's quite possible that you might have regretted it afterwards; and what an awkward position you'd have been in then. Believe me, you're much more comfortable as you are. You've got your home and your money and your friends, and one of these days, I hope, you'll have a good husband. I don't believe nature ever intended you to give up such evident blessings and to put yourself into social exile. As I said before, it's a question of staying up or going down, and I can't think you're meant to do the latter."

"Not even if it was down the steps of honor," the girl said, mournfully.

"For pity's sake, Agatha, don't get that expression on the brain! I just dropped it accidentally. I didn't suppose you were going to seize on it and turn it into a text. But that's where you make yourself a trial. You're worse than a Browning Club. You'll take a person's words and put ten meanings into them, when it's very questionable if there's one."

Agatha sighed and leaned her face on her hand.

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She could not deny that Cousin Abby had remarkably clear views on the subject. Her house and her money and her friends meant much to her. "And I should have to go and leave them," she said to herself—"at least, I should have to leave my home and friends. I could keep the money, I suppose. I see it. I couldn't bring Anthony back into the old life. I should have to go with him and make a new one; but," she added, with a leaping of the heart, "it would be—yes, it *would* be—going down the steps of honor to help him up again."

Her reflections were interrupted by a sound of voices in the hall. Suddenly the door was thrown open and Mrs. Wollaston with a scarf over her head tottered in. Agatha and Cousin Abby were on their feet in an instant.

"My dears!" Mrs. Wollaston gasped, breathlessly. "My dears!"

"For mercy's sake, what is it?" Cousin Abby cried. "What brings you here so late? Where's Cousin Hector?"

"He's at home," Mrs. Wollaston panted. "I came with the cook. The most awful thing has happened. I couldn't wait till morning. I knew you wouldn't sleep if you heard it, any more than I shall."

"What in the name of pity can it be?" Miss Leggett demanded. "Why don't you tell us and be done with it? Is anything the matter with Cousin Hector?"

"No, no. It isn't that. Let me sit down. I'm ready to faint away."

Agatha pushed an arm-chair forward, and Mrs. Wollaston dropped into it.

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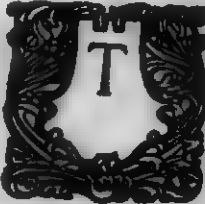
"No, it isn't Hector," she gasped again, as soon as she could get her breath. "It's Paul. He's been at our house all the evening acting like a madman. You'll never believe it when I tell you—never, never."

"If you don't tell us now, I'll shake you," Cousin Abby threatened, standing over her.

"Yes, I'll tell you. It doesn't seem to me as if I should ever get my senses again. And Hector gives me no sympathy whatever. My dears, I don't know what you'll say. Paul and Persis are—engaged."

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XXIII

O Agatha the new engagement was not so much a disappointment as a shock. She had the tenacity of idea natural to a mind that moves by slow, well-ordered processes, and it was difficult for her at all times to adapt herself to new conceptions. Though she had reason to guess at the nature of Dunster's feeling for Persis Wollaston, she could not discard, at a moment's notice, the long-standing conviction that his love was her own. When it was brought home to her that she was wrong, it was not the discovery that was painful, but the mental revolution. She was under no illusion whatever as to her own regard for him. It was a regard and nothing more. She had been ready to marry him, but only by way of sacrifice—sacrifice of her useless life to secure his happiness and please her friends. She would have put no heart into it, because she had no heart to put into anything. As to all this her mind was clear; but that Paul's happiness could be secured elsewhere was a surprise so sudden as to be very like a blow. For a few hours it seemed to leave her more desolate than ever. It was only as her mind accustomed itself gradually to the new situation that she saw it to be the best one. If Paul and Persis loved each other, surely nothing could be more

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satisfactory on all grounds of family interest and neighborly affection.

So in the morning she went to Persis and kissed and blessed her in complete sincerity. She shook hands with Dunster and wished him well, in such a way as to leave no suspicion of the thought that twenty-four hours before she had expected life to take a different turn for all of them. If she was conscious of a twinge in letting him go, it was only such a twinge as a woman feels in giving away a jewel that has been one of her treasures, but which she cannot wear. In her secret heart she already felt a certain relief in the fact that Dunster's destiny could be worked out separately from her own.

That relief grew stronger as the days went by. In the new turn of events she began to perceive that she was much less the centre of attraction in their little group than she had been hitherto. It was extraordinary with what facility Cousin Abby Leggett and Cousin Mary Dunster and Cousin Fanny Wollaston had deposed Agatha from her pedestal and put Persis up on it. They acknowledged Persis's supremacy with as speedy a loyalty as bees acknowledge a new queen. There was no talk now but of Persis's clothes and Persis's tastes and what the young couple would need in the way of house-linen. They revelled in the engagement with as much glee as if it had been the very one they had planned for years to bring about.

Agatha was, therefore, left much to the society of her own thoughts, and she was glad of it. It enabled her to co-ordinate her new impressions and adjust herself to the new conditions. It enabled her to go back

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and trace the sequence of small events that had led to the present state of things. She saw that she had had no reason to think that Paul had ever loved her except in the fact that every one had told her so. And yet her woman's instinct insisted that he had. She was sure of it. She had been to him in theory that ideal of the noble, faithful, ministering woman which Persis had become in practice.

When she had turned her back on Anthony Muir, Paul had been disillusioned. As Muir's ruin had revealed to Dunster his own littleness of character, so it had revealed hers. That was plain. It was plain, too, that he had turned with true masculine instinct to the woman whose spiritual nature was strong enough to help him upward—"up the steps of honor," Agatha added, clinging to the phrase. She had, therefore, been given up by one man because she had not been true to another. It was a curious situation, and her not very acute intelligence failed her in the effort to fathom so much psychological mystery.

It was not only Paul who felt so about her. Mr. Wollaston, in his way, did the same. She could see that now, from her talk with him of a few days before. In her literalness she had thought he meant one thing when he had clearly meant another. "Fanny would have stuck to me to the bitter end." And Fanny was his standard of everything feminine and noble. Even Cousin Abby had admitted that "a superior woman" could have done what she, Agatha Royal, had left undone. Her home, her money, her friends, and a good, commonplace husband were evidently considered to be enough to satisfy all her yearnings. There were better things than these in life, but they could be

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found only in going down the steps of honor, which she was not the woman to descend.

She admitted the justice of these opinions about her, and yet she knew that her nature within was essentially loyal and true. If she had been unequal to the higher way, it was because, in her bitterness and humiliation, she had not seen it. That was the hard part of it. She had done battle with herself, only to force her feet into the less worthy road. Now she had gone so far on it that it was too late to retrace her footsteps.

Was it too late? Yes, surely. Cousin Abby must be right. "No man with any pride would accept the loyalty that comes halting along six months behindhand." That sentence seemed not only to paralyze her action, but to prevent her mind from working forward. If it were not that she saw herself always "halting along six months behindhand" a way might have been found. Persis might have done something. In her own new happiness she might have conveyed some hint to Muir. But Agatha dared not ask her. He was proud and she had treated him disdainfully. She could see herself still as she handed him back his ring, without a word of pity or a look of farewell. She could see him, too, as he opened the door for her to sweep by—guilty, ruined, but courteous to the last. After long months of anguish she was only beginning to perceive that he would never have emptied himself of all earthly consideration as he had done had he not possessed those saving qualities of courage that make a man. But it was too late for her to put forth any recognition of that fact now. She could only let him work out his own salvation, and re-

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sign herself to having neither part nor lot in the task.

March went out and April came in, with its birds and buds and soft west winds and sense of sprouting joyousness. The date of the wedding was fixed for early June. Agatha and Cousin Abby were in the library one evening discussing their own respective parts in the festivity when the maid announced a strange young man. He wished to see Miss Royal privately, and gave his name as "Mr. John Charterhouse."

"It seems to me I've heard it before," Agatha said, "but I don't know where."

"Have him shown in here," Miss Leggett advised, lifting herself heavily from her arm-chair. "I'll go into the next room, so that if he tries to murder you I can put my head out of the window and call for help."

A minute later Charterhouse was ushered in. He was as small and wistful as ever, but in brand-new clothes and gloves he had an air of increased importance. Wondering who he was and what he had come for, Agatha bowed and asked him to sit down. He did so at once and opened the conversation with characteristic simplicity.

"I guess you'd like to know what brings me, Miss Royal," he said, looking her in the eyes with the wan directness that had touched Muir.

"If I can be of any service to you I shall be very glad," Agatha returned. She suspected he was one of the students who "put themselves through college" by becoming agents for butter or buttons or some other harmless household necessity.

"I've come," he went on, "because we want to give Miss Persis Wollaston a wedding-present, and we

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thought perhaps you'd help us to pick out something she'd specially like."

Agatha was too much astonished to reply at once, so Charterhouse continued.

"I hope you won't be offended, Miss Royal, but we thought that nobody would know as well as you. You see, we can't spend much money on it, not even when we all club together, so we thought that something real useful would be best. We don't want it to be anything that she'd have half a dozen of, nor anything that she'd put away and forget. We'd like it to be something she'd use for herself every day and all the time. We've thought of napkin-rings and salad-forks and pickle-jars, but we concluded she'd have as many of those things as she'd want. So we thought that if we saw you about it you'd suggest something real unique, that nobody else would give her and that she couldn't do without."

"May I inquire," Agatha asked, "whom you mean by *we*?"

"I mean Lucy Brooks and Daisy Pine and Edgar Ford and Harry Hathaway and Murray Johnson and all the rest of the Roxbury crowd that Mr. Muir has been so good to."

Agatha started, but forced herself to speak calmly.

"Did Mr. Muir suggest your coming to me?"

"No, Miss Royal. He doesn't know anything about it. It's entirely our own idea. You see, Lucy Brooks and Daisy Pine and I are the committee; and, as Miss Wollaston has always praised you up so and said you were her best friend, we were sure you'd help us. We don't want to throw good money away on something she wouldn't like."

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Again Agatha could not reply. She sat looking at him, but almost without knowing he was there. These, then, were the people of quite modest station in life of whom the professor had spoken and among whom Anthony had cast his lot. What Persis had to do with them she could not quite make out, but evidently they loved her. And now they were coming to include her. It seemed as if the dark clouds that wrapt her round were lifting and a light were shining through.

"I hope you're not offended, Miss Royal," Johnny Charterhouse said, when the silence had lasted for some minutes.

"No, no; I'm only thinking," Agatha answered him. "I'm thinking what Miss Wollaston would like. Is Mr. Muir quite—quite well?"

"He's pretty well, Miss Royal. He's not so well as he was. It's my belief he works too hard. He scarcely ever goes out except for an hour or so in Franklin Park. There he can take a good, swinging walk, just as if he were in the country, and in the early part of the afternoon there are never any people about. But he always goes straight back to his work again, and it isn't good for him."

"He works at his writing, I suppose."

"Some; but that's not the hardest part of it. He has pretty nearly his whole day filled up with some of the crowd. He's coaching two fellows for their finals and one for his preliminaries and three or four that are going to be school-teachers; and a lot of us others, who have jobs during the day, work with him at night. It's all for nothing, too, Miss Royal; for he only takes boys and girls who haven't the money

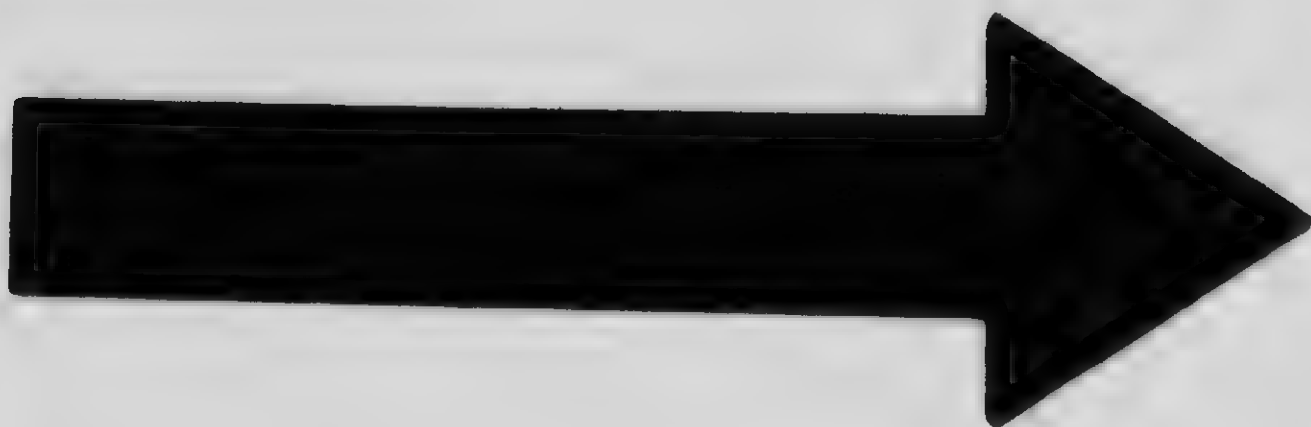
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to pay for superior instruction and would have to do without it. If it wasn't for him they wouldn't be learning anything at all, or else they'd be drudging along alone."

"How did Mr. Muir happen to begin that work?"

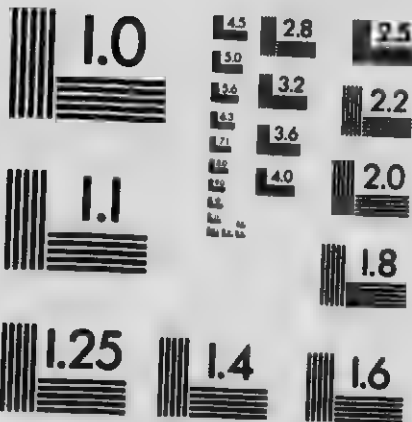
"It began with me, Miss Royal," the boy said, proudly; and then, without waiting for further invitation, he told the story of what Anthony Muir had done for him. He told it with day and date, so that Agatha, putting one thing with another, could see the boy's history interwoven with the man's. She could see Muir, in helping Johnny Charterhouse to work out his penance, working out his own. She could almost trace the progression of his thoughts during the last week he remained at Harvard.

As the lad talked she plied him with questions. In a few minutes she knew everything there was to know. She learned how Muir had gone to Greenland Park, how he had lived at first and how he was living now. She learned how he had taken up his mission by teaching French to Charterhouse himself and Latin to Lucy Brooks. She learned how Lucy Brooks had brought Daisy Pine and Daisy Pine had brought Edgar Ford and Edgar Ford had brought Harry Hathaway, and how the chain had been thrown out farther still. She learned how, just by chance, Charterhouse had one day met Paul Dunster, and in reply to Dunster's questions told why he had left Harvard, what he was doing, and where he was living. She learned how Charterhouse had mentioned to Dunster the presence in Greenland Park of Anthony Muir. She learned how Persis, inspired by Dunster, had come to Mrs. Brooks on the pretext of having dresses



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made, how she had brought Dunster's books for Muir to read, and how she had begun to work with Daisy Pine. She learned how Persis, without knowing it, had been Muir's consolation, and had kept him in touch with the world. She learned, in short, all the development of heart, character, and conscience that had been taking place that winter among some of those who were nearest her, but of which she was ignorant, because she had turned her eyes away. She felt scorn of herself for her pride, for her hardness, for her inactivity; but she could not let the boy see that. She compelled herself to let the conversation shift from Muir to the errand on which Charterhouse had come.

"Perhaps," she said, after they had discussed the subject further—"perhaps it would be better if Miss Brooks and Miss Pine were to come and see me themselves about it. It's possible that if three women's heads get together they might beat out a happier suggestion than you and I alone." Charterhouse thought the idea excellent and so did she. It would put her more fully in touch with Muir and his interests than she could be in any other way. "I shall be at home to-morrow evening and delighted to see them," she said. Charterhouse undertook that they should appear, and promised to escort them over. Then he rose to go away.

"I think you said that Mr. Muir went out to walk every day in Franklin Park," she said, after they had shaken hands.

"Yes, Miss Royal."

"In the early part of the afternoon?"

"Yes, Miss Royal."

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"Does he always go in the same direction?"

"I don't know about that, but he always goes in and out by the gate just up from Greenland Park."

"It would be between two and four o'clock, I suppose?"

"Yes, Miss Royal."

"Thank you, Mr. Charterhouse. Good-night, and I shall see you again to-morrow. Tell Miss Brooks and Miss Pine what pleasure they'll give me in coming."

He bowed his final leave-taking clumsily, and was fumbling at the door when another idea occurred to her.

"And, Mr. Charterhouse," she said, "don't mention to Mr. Muir that you saw me."

"No, Miss Royal; certainly not," he answered, and passed out into the hall.

He was looking, in the semi-obscurity of the hanging-lamp, for his hat and overcoat when she hurried after him.

"Perhaps," she said, with some hesitation—"perhaps you might tell him that you did see me."

"Yes, Miss Royal. I'll do that."

"Thank you. Good-night."

"Good-night, Miss Royal. Thank you very much."

She returned to the library and listened while Charterhouse opened the street door. In a minute he would be gone, she thought, and she might never have another opportunity.

"Oh, Mr. Charterhouse," she called, slipping out to him again. He turned with his hand on the knob.

"Perhaps," she stammered—"perhaps, after all, you can say that I told you to tell him you saw me. Tell

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him we've been talking about him, and that I've been very much moved."

"Yes, Miss Royal," he answered, with the same mechanical utterance as before.

When he had closed the door behind him, she remained standing in the hall. She put her hands to her flaming cheeks and wondered what explanation she could give of them to Cousin Abby. To herself she was saying with a kind of exultation:

"I've taken the first step down towards him. If he wants me to come all the way I will leave everything else behind."

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XXIV



AT two o'clock on the following day Agatha drove into Franklin Park to the entrance indicated by John Charterhouse. Her heart beat wildly and she was almost afraid to look about her. She knew she was doing that which nothing but success could justify. If she failed she would reproach herself all her life for having made the attempt. When she saw a rustic bench beside some yellow-flowering shrubs she got out of the carriage and bade the coachman drive farther on. She trembled so that she could scarcely reach the seat. All her senses seemed to merge into that of fear—the fear lest he should come, and the greater fear lest he should not come.

From where she sat no one could enter or pass out through the gateway unobserved. For the time being she had the wide extent of mead, playstead, and woodland entirely to herself. The children were still at school, and it was too soon for leisured strollers to come and take the air. The trees were in tender bud, the grass was vividly green, while here and there an early dandelion made a gold spot like a star. But Agatha saw none of these things, nor was she conscious of the spring. All her powers of vision were concentrated on the open gate through which her

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destiny, for good or ill, might come. In the half-hour that passed she did not mark the flight of time; it might have been a minute, it might have been a year.

When, at last, a tall figure came in sight all capacity of volition or intention seemed to leave her. She rose and went forward by instinct, without reflection or conscious thought. It was as though she was borne onward by some power independent of herself, to which there was no resistance.

He walked slowly, with bowed head, like a man overweighted with a sense of lassitude. He did not look up nor notice her until she was close beside him and he heard her cry:

"Oh, Anthony, you've turned gray!"

It was not what she had prepared to say. The words came out in spite of herself. The sight of his whitened hair had torn them from her.

He stopped and looked at her in amazement. For an instant neither of them seemed to breathe. It was he who broke the silence first.

"I didn't know you were here," he said, "otherwise I shouldn't have come."

"Oh, don't say that," she pleaded. "I waited for you."

"You—you—wanted to see me?"

"I had to see you," she returned, clasping her hands tightly, like a person in prayer.

"Why?"

He asked the question not coldly, but distantly, in a voice which expressed no emotion beyond a faint surprise.

"You got my message—last night—from Mr. Charterhouse?"

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She was getting farther and farther from all that she had meant to say.

"Yes," he answered, in the same dull tone. "You were very kind."

"I wanted you to know," she hurried on, confusedly, "that I was thinking of you. I thought that perhaps you'd let me help you."

"Help me?"

"In your work, you know—in what you're doing for the young people. Not you—of course, not you."

"Oh, that!" he said, with the faintest smile of fatigue. "I'm not doing much, and it's work in which, from its very nature, no one can be of service but myself."

"I thought that, since Persis is going, I might perhaps—possibly—if you were willing—I might take up her—"

"She's coming back," he interrupted. "She means to go right on after her marriage as she did before."

"Then something else," she urged. "I don't care what it is. Oh, Anthony," she burst out, "don't look at me like that! I'm so sorry for the past!"

It was said now—the very thing she had intended not to utter unless he himself drew the confession forth. He had not done so. It had come of its own accord. It had come because her heart could not keep it back any longer. It had come chiefly because he had stood away from her, looking at her as from the other side of an unbridged gulf.

"Suppose we sit down," he said, gently. "I see you're trembling. I'm afraid the effort of coming here has been too much for you."

He led the way to the bench from which she had

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risen. She followed with bowed head, her breath coming brokenly, like sobs.

"Now, won't you tell me just what you mean?" he said, when they were seated side by side, turning slightly towards each other. He spoke in the kindly voice one might use towards a child.

"I mean," she tried to answer, "that I'm sorry I misjudged you."

"Oh no," he broke in, quickly. "You didn't misjudge me."

"And if," she went on—"if I'd known there was the other way, I should have taken it."

"What other way?" he asked, with gentle coldness.

"It wasn't necessary—what I did," she managed to say. "I could have acted otherwise. If I'd thought less of myself and more of you—"

"You could have made the sacrifice," he added, as she hesitated.

"Yes," she said, "and I should have made it gladly."

There was a pause. Muir looked on the ground as though reflecting.

"You ought not to reproach yourself," he said, at last, glancing up at her again. "You did only what I should have insisted on—if I had had the choice."

"You mean that we couldn't have gone on—"

"I mean that I couldn't have accepted the sacrifice you might have been willing to make. If you'll think awhile you'll see that I couldn't. If it had been any other kind of wrong—I mean one of those forms of wrong which don't require that a man shall fall from the position he happens to hold and lose a place of respect among his fellow-men—then, I don't say but

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that it might have been otherwise. If you had been able to forgive me then, I might have availed myself of that forgiveness and begun again. But in 'his case—"

"It makes no difference to me," she cried.

"But it does to me," he said, with more feeling in his tone than he had betrayed hitherto. "Out into the world where I was obliged to go—"

"I would have followed," she said, proudly.

"But I couldn't have let you. Don't you see? It wouldn't have been possible. It would have been worse than everything I had done before. You would have wanted to comfort me—"

"Yes, yes."

"But you would have made me more unhappy. It was bad enough to suffer alone, but if I had made you suffer, too—"

"You couldn't save me from that. I did suffer as it was."

"Yes, of course. That couldn't be helped. That was an inevitable part of the wrong I did you. But at least you suffered in your own home and among your own friends and with a prospect of consolation sometime, before you. No, believe me, you mustn't reproach yourself. Don't try to take from me the one poor ray of satisfaction which lights up my life—that I saved you from bearing my name and sharing my downfall."

"Oh, Anthony," she moaned, "you don't understand!"

"I do understand. I understand that the winter has been hard for you—perhaps as hard as it's been for me. And now you're tired—"

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"I am. I'm more than tired."

"And it seems to you as if the easiest thing, and perhaps the happiest thing, would be for you and me to blot out the last few months and try to pick up our life from the days when we first began to—began—"

He hesitated and stammered. He did not dare to use the old word again.

"But we couldn't do it," he resumed. "We couldn't blot out what I've done wrong. The memory of it would be always between us."

"But I've done wrong, too," she urged.

"Not like mine. But you're tired. What you need is courage to fight on a little longer."

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone. It's only alone that this sort of battle can be waged. You'll win yet."

"And forget you? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. You'll forget me. It's all I can pray for."

"And you'll forget me, too?"

Again the ghost of a smile hovered on his lips.

"There's no question of me," he said, as if it were a matter of indifference. "All I live on is what I have to remember. But I shall have more now," he added—"now that you've come to tell me this."

"But you'll let me come again?"

"You'd better not," he said, gently. "It's very good of you to have come to-day, but it will be easier for us both if we consider this to be—the end."

"And the work? Can't I do anything?"

"There's nothing to be done—nothing you could do."

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"You turn me away, then?"

"I don't turn you away. I'm only too far off for you to reach me. I'm too far off and too low down. I'm not in the same world that I used to be in—not any more than I'm the same Anthony Muir. You can see that by looking at me. I'm an old man at thirty, and I've nothing left but an old man's dreams."

"What are they?"

"His dreams of the past, dreams that can never have any realization until he wakes up—elsewhere."

"Do you know that you break my heart when you talk like that?"

"I know I must give you pain. That's why I say that it would be easier for us both if we didn't meet again."

"I want to ask you something," she said, in a tone of despairing impatience. "Do you think there's anything in the world that's worth anything at all to me as long as you and I are—like this?"

"It isn't a question of what you can give, it's a question of what I can take. I haven't much honor left, but I should have none at all if I allowed you to come down from your position to share mine."

"But if I wanted to? If it was killing me because I couldn't?"

"You're discouraged because you're tired," he said, in the same monotonous tone. "But I'm sure you must know that your battle is half won. A little more courage and you'll be stronger. A few months hence—a year hence at most—"

She rose, wearily.

"You drive me to despair," she said, in the tone of one who gives up the struggle. "You let me humili-

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ate myself for nothing. You're perfectly pitiless. I shouldn't have come, only that I took it for granted that we both felt as we used to feel. I didn't think it necessary to question that. And now I begin to see that you've—"

"For God's sake, Agatha, don't think that!" he cried, springing to his feet. "It's more to me than ever. It's all I have."

"Then why—?" she began to argue, all over again.

"Because I can't," he insisted. "Because I never can. Because it isn't possible for you to come down to me—not any more than it is possible for me to climb up to you."

She moved out of the shrubbery into the roadway and towards the carriage.

"I didn't think," she said, as he walked beside her—

"I didn't think you were a man who would let the shadow hide the substance, or let a morbid fancy stand between me—please notice that I say *me*—between me and any comfort there may be left for me."

"If I didn't know life so well," he returned, "if I couldn't look forward and see you a few years hence, happy and with this all behind you—"

She stopped in her walk and confronted him.

"Anthony," she cried, "do you really think I can ever be happy again? If so, you may know life, but you don't know me. I couldn't have been happy as it was, and now—since we have had this conversation—less than ever. I've done what no other woman would have done—"

"No other woman would have been noble enough," he murmured.

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"I've thrown myself at your feet, and you wouldn't stoop to pick me up. Now you tell me to go and be happy, as if happiness were a commodity at command."

"I know it seems hard. You mustn't think it isn't harder for me than for any one. I've just one bit of inspiration that gives me strength for it—I'm saving you from yourself. It takes all the moral force I've got, but, thank God, I can do it. In future years—"

"Oh, don't talk to me of years!" she cried, with a mingling of exasperation and despair. "It's bad enough to have to meet the day, without looking beyond that."

"And yet the years pass," he said, as they began talking on again. "That's what I count on for your sake. They'll pass and you'll have a life more worthy of you than anything you could have with me. If I didn't love you so much—yes, let me say it just this once again—I didn't love you so much, so very much, I couldn't refuse the joy you're holding out to me. But it's because I do love you that I reject your sacrifice in order to claim the place for mine."

When he paused she made no answer, and they walked on in silence.

"I can't say anything more," she said, when they reached the carriage.

"No, you can't," he returned, quietly. "The last word will be with Time. For me Time will be shorter now, since you've come—this once."

"And I shall never come again," she said, "unless you send for me."

"It will be better so," he agreed, dully.

Her tears began to flow in spite of all her efforts

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after self-control, and she stepped up hastily into the carriage without his help. Then she turned and held out her hand.

"Good-bye," she murmured.

He bent over her hand and kissed it.

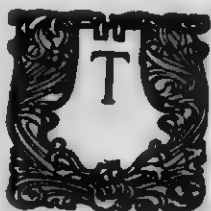
"Good-bye," he said, firmly, when he had raised himself. "Good-bye; good-bye."

The carriage rolled away and she did not turn to look at him again. She was tired—with a great, aching weariness. She felt bruised and stunned, as if she had been in some strange combat. As she drove out of the park she sank back among the cushions of the carriage as though with a sense of sheer, physical refreshment.

"No doubt he's right—no doubt he's right," she repeated to herself. "It will be easier for us both if we consider this to be—the end."

She was too tired to have acute sensations or reason on the subject further. As she passed on homeward, through the busy thoroughfares, her mind groped after vague recollections of a picture she had seen in some gallery abroad—a picture in which Love was being slain by Pride.

XXV



THE warm June afternoon was closing and Mrs. Wollaston was waiting for her husband to come home to dinner. It was unusual for him to be out so late, unless it were at some protracted meeting of the Faculty. It was the day after the wedding, and she had spent it in trying to "tidy up" the disordered house. She had gone from room to room, sighing over its emptiness now that Persis was no longer there. She took the contents of drawers and hung them up in closets, and she took the contents of closets and folded them up in drawers. Now and then, when she found anything that belonged to Persis, she sighed more heavily and brushed and smoothed and patted it with special care. An hour ago, when she had come across the quaint little suit in which the tiny orphan of four years old had been brought to make her home with them, she sat down and had what she called "a good, refreshing cry." After that she felt better, and began to wonder what in the world could detain Mr. Wollaston so long. She kept at her work, however, and did not hear him when he opened the street door.

"Fanny!" he called, loudly. "Where are you?"

"I'm here, Hector," she answered, running from

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Persis's room to the head of the stairs. She knew by his voice that something was the matter.

"There's the devil to pay!" he cried up to her, as he stood in the hall below.

"There's the—what, Hector?"

"I said the devil, and if there was anything worse than the devil it would be that."

"But I can't think—"

"Of course you can't think. Nobody ever could think. Come down."

"Whatever can it be?" she asked, fluttering over the stairs towards him.

He drew back from her, and stood in the attitude of Jove about to hurl a thunder-bolt.

"Prepare yourself, my dear," he warned her.

"I'm prepared, Hector, and I'm dying to know."

"Agatha Royal is going to marry Muir. There!"

Mrs. Wollaston displayed a disappointing lack of astonishment.

"Well, I'm not surprised," was her only comment.

"I've seen for the last few months that she'd have to do it or go into a decline. So they're engaged again."

"They're worse than engaged; they're nearly married."

"Nearly married, Hector! Why, what do you mean? Nearly married!"

"Well, so they are. They're going to be married to-night."

Mrs. Wollaston uttered a light scream.

"To-night? To-night? Hector, are you crazy?"

"I'm the only one who's sane, as far as I can see; and my mind is going fast."

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"And mine will be clean gone if you don't tell me this very minute what it's all about."

"The whole thing," the professor explained, "is the fault of that young elf, Johnny Charterhouse. I said from the beginning that that boy should have been put in prison, and it's a thousand pities that he wasn't sent there for life."

"What can he have—?"

"It seems that Muir is ill—been ill for some time. Trouble and overwork, the doctor says, but I don't believe it. Anyhow, they've all been worried about him. They try this thing and that thing, but nothing does him any good. Then my lord Johnny Charterhouse gets it into his head that he knows the cure. Over he goes to Agatha Royal and she walks straight into the trap."

"But she was here this morning—to get the spoons and forks she lent us yesterday."

"He was lying in wait for her when she went back, and she cleared out with him as if she'd been kidnapped. The next thing I know, Johnny Charterhouse travels after me and catches me just as I'm coming out of Massachusetts. All I can gather from him is that Agatha is in a most painful and equivocal position. Off I have to go with him to a place called Greenland Park—miles and miles outside the pale of civilization."

"And what then?"

"Then I'm marched up-stairs into a room; and what do I find but Anthony Muir lying in bed, his face as white as his hair and his hair as white as his face."

"Oh, poor fellow! How he must have suffered! Was there nobody with him?"

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"Nobody! There was Miss Agatha Royal, with her hat off and an apron on, making herself quite at home. I could have blushed, Fanny."

"But you didn't—?"

"They didn't give me time. They both began to talk at once, and I couldn't make out half of what they were trying to say. All I could understand was that he didn't want to marry her or she didn't want to marry him, and he wouldn't have the ceremony unless she'd go away and she wouldn't go away unless she had the ceremony, and he would and she wouldn't and she could and he couldn't and fiddle-faddle and falfal—you never heard such a rigmarole. It was enough to take your head off. But the upshot of it all was that they were going to be married to-night."

"And none of us there?"

"All of us there! My good woman, you haven't heard the half of it yet. You're to get yourself together and be over there by half-past eight. Bless your soul, I'm to be bridesmaid and you're to be best man, or t'other way round! Everything is so topsyturvy that it doesn't matter which."

"But she hasn't any clothes. When she was here this morning she had nothing on but that last year's muslin. She couldn't be married in that."

"Oh, bless your heart! Johnny Charterhouse has attended to all that. He's been over and got Abby Leggett to pack her up a regular trousseau. You never saw such a boy."

"For pity's sake! I never knew people *could* be married in such a higgledy-piggledy way. Aren't there laws about it?"

"Oh, we've kept all of them," the professor said,

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ironically. "Johnny Charterhouse looked out for that. You'd never believe the indignity to which he subjected me."

"You, Hector!"

"Yes, me, Fanny—me in my own proper person. Almost before I knew what they were driving at, or who wanted to be married and who didn't, I was marched off with Agatha to get a license—just as if I were going to sell spirits. I had to put down her age and her color, and his age and his color, and how many times they'd both been married before, and the Lord knows what besides. It cost me fifty cents, and Agatha didn't so much as hint at returning it. It's all perfectly shameful, and I never expected to live to see this day."

"Oh, I wouldn't look at it in that way, Hector, dear," she said, consolingly. "If you were a woman you'd understand—"

"I shouldn't understand if I were a horse, let alone a woman," he roared, savagely. "There are things that pass the limits of human comprehension—'pon my soul there are!"

"But I shouldn't call this one of them, Hector. When two people love each other as Agatha and Mr. Muir evidently do, then there's no sin on the one side which won't be pardoned on the other, not unless"—she coughed and colored before she could finish her sentence—"not unless it's habitual unfaithfulness."

"Even so, they could be married in an open, respectable manner."

"Everything depends on circumstances, dear," she reasoned, gently. "My heart goes out to Agatha, I must say. No one but a woman can know how much

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another woman aches and yearns to do for the man she loves, when he's ill or in trouble or abandoned by everybody else. The wife's instinct always has in it something of the mother's, and no creature deprived of its young could suffer more than I've seen Agatha suffer lately. It hasn't been only the need to see him and hear his voice; it's been the need to *do*, to give out the treasures of love and care and protection that every good woman has within her. Oh, you can't tell me! I was rather surprised that she didn't feel so when the trouble came last year, but I see that she's only been slow to awaken. And now that she goes there and finds him ill—oh, I can quite understand!—she simply doesn't mean to leave him. That's all there is about it. I should feel precisely the same. If when we were engaged I'd gone to you and found you ill *and* deserted *and* unhappy I should have stayed by your bedside, married or single."

"Oh, my dear Fanny!"

"Yes, Hector—married—or—single—but there I should have stayed. They could have come and married me if they had liked. They could have married me with a curtain-ring or a button-hook, but—there—I—should—have—stayed!" Mrs. Wollaston emphasized her words by staccato taps on the bannister with what, for her, was an unusual degree of force. "Mind you," she went on, "I could wish that Agatha were married in any other way and perhaps to any other man—though I haven't my mind altogether made up about that—but I repeat that in her situation I should do the very same."

"But you're not out of it yet," he warned her. "There's worse in store for you than anything you've

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heard. You didn't know, perhaps, that as soon as Muir can be moved they're planning to spend their honeymoon at our cottage at the sea-side."

"Well, that does stagger me," she admitted.

"I thought it would, ma'am."

"But if you've asked them, Hector—"

"I? Not a bit of it. I'd scarcely begun to think of it before the thing was done. The very words were taken out of my mouth. Something was said about his having sea-air and sympathy—I don't just know what—and before I knew where I was, I was all tangled up and they had it settled. I wash my hands of it; but I knew that that would bowl you over if nothing else would."

"But I'm not sure, Hector," she said, in her slow, reflecting tone, "that it wouldn't be a good thing. We could cut the door we've so often talked of between the guest-room and Persis's room, and we could repaper them both and—"

"Oh, that's it. Build the house over again."

"I'm *sure* it would be a good thing," she cried, with conviction. "It would be a good thing in every way. If we have them under our protection, as it were, no one can say a word. All the college people will see how we feel, and—and it *will* make a difference. Besides that, now that dear Persis won't be there, Agatha will be company for you."

"And Muir for you, I suppose you mean."

"Oh, as long as you're there, Hector, I have all the company I want."

"Don't count on me. I'm not sure that I shall be there at all. I sha'n't be long for this world if things keep happening as they're doing now."

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The maid came to announce dinner, and they hurried off to make a few elementary preparations.

The meal was eaten hastily and almost in silence. Each had matter for thought. The professor missed his little Persis, and was reckoning up exactly how many weeks it would be before she returned from her honeymoon abroad. Mrs. Wollaston missed her, too; but, in spite of everything, her mind worked busily, and, in a certain sense, cheerfully, over the changes she would make in the cottage for the new guests' occupation.

Before dinner was ended she left the table to array herself in the very gown and bonnet she had worn at Persis's wedding yesterday. *She* would be dressed like a lady, at any rate, she said to herself, as she put them on.

When she descended the carriage was already there. Mr. Wollaston stood beside it, the door open, to hand her in.

"Muir is marrying as I did," he said, as she appeared; "he's taking her out of pity."

With her foot on the step and her hand in his she turned and looked at him.

"And Agatha is marrying as I did," she answered, quietly; "she's taking him to save his life."

For a second they remained thus, smiling into each other's eyes. Then, with a lilt as light as in 1861, she sprang into the carriage and they started for the wedding.

THE END

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